

Not welcome here

Local Liverpool fans' experience of recent commercial changes in English football

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Abstract

This thesis examines how local Liverpool fans relate and respond to recent commercial developments in English football. A phenomenological approach is employed in order to understand how they experience these changes. By April 2010, half the English Premier League clubs are owned by foreign investors and businessmen. Several clubs are struggling with large debts. In February 2007, Liverpool Football Club was taken over by the American investors Tom Hicks and George Gillett. The fans believed, in this early stage of what seemed a new era for the club, that the Americans would invest their own money in order to build a new stadium and increase the club's revenues. This would release funds to spend on new players which would subsequently enhance the club's chances to once again become the best team in the country. Even though the owners had borrowed money to buy the club, they promised not to transfer the debt on to the club. Regardless of this promise though, they did. Three years after the take-over, the club is struggling with a debt exceeding £200m. No stadium has been built and the club may be forced to sell players to cover the debt. Needless to say, this has caused strong reactions from the fans. Although the fans' perception of reality differs from the one insisted on by the owners, the fans' views are nonetheless what they believe to be true regardless of what the owners might think. And if the fans believe that this is what it really is like, then it is also what reality is for them, because people perceive the objects of the world through their experience of it and this experience comes from living in the world. But knowledge about and experience of the world is also passed on to others through narratives. In this way, when stories are told, one learns about the world as well as it indicates what matters for people as members of a certain community. My fieldwork in Liverpool lasted for almost five months. From participating in the fans' activities, talking with them and listening to their stories, I got a look into how the Liverpool fans experience the situation the club is currently in. So in an attempt to convey how the fans experience the world, and how this is expressed through stories and activities, this thesis examines how and why the fans have turned against the American owners. Further, it looks into what significance the football stadium has for the fans. For the club to be able to compete with other top teams in England and Europe, the fans seem to demand a move to a bigger stadium, even though this means the club will have to leave Anfield, their home ground since the club was established. Finally, the thesis examines what local players mean for the local fans, in a time when only two local players play regularly for the club.

Foreword

In November 1992, I was in Liverpool for the first time. My father, brother and I went there to watch Liverpool play Crystal Palace. We had tickets on the Kop. Liverpool put five balls behind the Palace goalkeeper. The Kop swayed and sung songs. Everything was like I imagined it to be.

One month later, Liverpool signed their first ever Norwegian. I remember my mum coming into my room to tell me the news. Apparently she thought this was good news:

“Stig Inge has signed for Liverpool!!” she told me enthusiastically.

I just lay on my bed. Stared at the ceiling. One of the worst days of my life. A Norwegian playing for Liverpool?!! Not only that. He was from Elverum too. My hometown. My mum tried to cheer me up. No chance of that.

Sixteen years later, I am in *the Sandon*, the place where the club was founded. I am there with some locals. We are discussing the shortcomings of Norwegian footballers. I realise I am not alone.

“There’s been a lot of Norwegians at Liverpool over the years,” Darren acknowledges. He is not very impressed.

“Riise was not much, Kvarme was shit. Bjornebye was shit.”

He stops, tries to come up with more names.

“Heggem was quite good, though,” he admits. “I remember seeing him in Istanbul completely slugged, drinking beer in his tracksuit outside the stadium.”

Matt does not completely agree with Darren’s assessment of the Norwegians.

“Riise was quite good in his first couple of years. He did score some important goals,” he argues.

“Yeah, he could shoot.” Darren grants him that. “But he didn’t know how to defend.”

“Who else did we have?” Darren tries to remember more Norwegians.

“Leonhardsen,” I say, trying to trigger his memory.

“What?” Darren is not able to make out what I am saying. Maybe he has trouble understanding my Norwegian accent.

“Leonhardsen,” I say again, trying it out with more of a Scouse accent.

Darren thinks hard, trying to understand. After a short while he gets it.

“Aah! Leon-a-a-rdsen,” he says, sort of teaching me how to pronounce the name.

“He was shit, though.” Darren continues. “I always fancied Patrik Berger over Leonhardsen. A friend of mine thought Leonhardsen was a better player than Berger. I couldn’t believe it.”

“So here we go slagging off every Norwegian that has played for Liverpool.” Darren hopes he has not been too rude.

“Oh, no problem,” I say. “Some of the magic disappeared when Liverpool bought their first Norwegian.”

Following Liverpool Football Club and English football has been part of my life for almost as long as I can remember. Despite the shortcomings of certain Norwegian players, it still is. Since my first trip in 1992, I have been over several times. It was sort of like a dream come true when this opportunity emerged - to live in Liverpool for five months and do a master’s degree in Social Anthropology.

But doing this would have been more or less impossible without the help of others. Although the names of those who appear in this written account have been altered, I want to thank all my mates in Liverpool who helped me out during my fieldwork and made my stay very memorable indeed. A special thanks to Tage Herstad too, who got me tickets for several matches as well as a seat on the supporters’ coach to away games.

Back home, thanks to my family and friends, even though most of you probably did not, and still not do, have a clue about what I have been doing, other than writing about football. I also want to thank my fellow students, with whom I have spent considerable time the last two years.

Further, I want to thank my supervisor, Arve Sørum, for taking an interest in my project, for giving me good advice, and for understanding what I had written, when

sometimes I did not. And last, but not least, thanks to the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo, who gave me money for beer...

The fieldwork was conducted from the beginning of January till the end of May 2009. The thesis has been produced in the period between September 2009 and April 2010. So this account is, in that sense, both influenced by what happened during my fieldwork and things that have happened after my return back home.

Finally, a note to the reader: Descriptions of different situations and happenings will be in italics, like the examples above.

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Prologue

Saturday 31st of October

The alarm clock is ringing. It is half past five in the morning. I get up because there is no time to waste now. Take a shower and a quick cup of coffee. I get my bag, put my jacket on and head for the bus station. I lock the bike, walk through the station and find my bus. I am on my way to England again. Two hours later I arrive at the airport. I go through the security check. No beep. Put my belt back on. Grab my bag and head for the cash machine. Two hundred pounds. I walk upstairs and through the passport control. Two hours to Stansted. I arrive in London at eleven and call my friend to ask if he has got a ticket.

"No problem, mate! Will you take a children's ticket? It's only twenty five pounds."

"As long as I don't get arrested..."

"No worries, all the lads do it."

"Alright, where shall I meet you?"

"Just call me when you get to Fulham Broadway."

I get on the train for Liverpool Street Station. Need to change to the Underground from there. I look at the map, find the District Line and head down the escalators. I get off at Fulham Broadway. I call again.

"Sorry, mate. We're at a pub near Putney Brigde – the King's Arms. Call me when you get there."

"Alright, no problem"

I go back under ground and wait for the tube to come. One minute later, I am on my way again. I get off at Putney Bridge and ask a police officer where the pub is.

"Just go down this street." He is pointing out the direction for me. "Then turn right. It's just around the corner. You can't miss it."

"Alright, cheers."

I meet a friend as I am on my way in.

“Alright, mate. They’re in the back – outside. Ian will get you a ticket. I’m just going to the pub across the street. I’ll be back in a minute.”

I head for the bar. “A pint of lager please, mate.”

The bartender picks up a plastic glass and starts pouring.

“That’ll be £3.60, mate.”

The place is packed. I try to make my way through the crowd. Not easy in this place. Lucky for me, people carrying beer is holy in England. They will make every effort to get out of the way as well as telling their friends that “man with beer is coming”. Everybody moves. I get through and out the back. Five months after I left Liverpool, I am back in the field.

“How are you, mate?” Ian asks me.

“Still trying to get my head around the thesis,” I tell him.

“HAHA! You were in Liverpool just to get drunk and shag the birds!” he bursts out.

I laugh with him.

“But that’s alright. Pretty much the same I did when I was young.”

“How’s the writing going?”

“Well... Not bad. I spend a lot of time in the library these days.”

“HAHA!! Sounds like a lot of fun...”

“It’s alright. Not quite like going to football matches and drinking beer, though...”

“Fuckin’ hell. I am out of beer.” Ian checks his plastic bag. Only empty cans.

“Do you need money?” Andy asks him before he starts laughing.

Ian smiles back at him. He is not going to the bar for more beer. He is going to the shop next door. The lads are already pretty boozed up. They came from Liverpool by train this morning.

After a while, Ian comes back with six cans of Budweiser. We drink our beer. Ian makes a couple of phone-calls to find out where he can meet the lads with the tickets. The place is quite noisy so he has problems hearing what the man at the other end says. His daughter helps him out.

“Just tell him we’ll meet him outside the stadium fifteen minutes before kick-off!” he says.

He turns to me.

“I can’t fucking hear anymore. I used to work in this factory when I was younger. Now I can’t hear a fucking thing.”

Ian makes the sign that we should leave now. We get up and make our way out of the pub.

“GET OUT OUR CLUB – YOU YANKEE BASTARDS – GET OUT OF OUR CLUB!!” reverberates as we fall into the street.

“You can’t drink on the street, mate!” the doorman says.

Ian empties his glass.

“Where the fuck do we go from here?” he asks.

“No idea,” Andy replies.

We cross the street. The pavement on the other side is full of football fans. We make a turn into a park. Ian and Andy lag behind. A couple of lads have been stopped by police for drinking in public. Mounted police appear. The ground must be just around the corner.

We find the lads with the tickets. A police officer stands just five yards to the left of them. Ian greets the lads, chats with them shortly and gets his tickets before he turns to me and gives me one. ‘Adult £49’ it says.

“Do you want the money now?” I ask him, thinking that the police officer might see us.

“Of course I want the money now.” Ian answers. A bit annoyed perhaps, or just surprised by such a stupid question.

“I am not taking money off you. Just give the money on the ticket.”

I pull out £50 from my wallet.

“It’s not £50!!” he says.

“It says ‘Adult’ here.” I tell him.

“No, this is a children’s ticket.” His daughter checks it out too.

“Yeah, it’s only £25,” she says.

I get £25 back without really understanding why it is a children’s ticket. The police officer does nothing. I thank Ian for the ticket and tell them I will see them after the match. I go through the turnstiles and find my seat in the stand. The match is already under way.

The problems of Liverpool FC continue. Two players are sent off. Fulham wins by three goals to one. A fellow behind me has foreseen it. After only forty minutes he bursts out:

“I can’t fucking watch this shite!!”

He phones his friend, telling him he is going for a pint instead.

I meet up with the lads after the match. The mood is, needless to say, depressed...

1 Introduction

Research question

In this thesis I will examine what Liverpool Football Club means for the community and for the supporters' life, identity and belonging. How do local Liverpool-supporters relate to the owners, players and stadium in this era of commercialisation?

Recently, English football has become a multi-million pound enterprise. Fans come from all over the world to watch football. Players come to the Premiership from abroad and the clubs attract interest from foreign investors and businessmen. Some clubs are moving away to bigger, more modern stadiums. All instigated by TV-money.

Back in 1983, BBC paid £2.6m for one season. From the introduction of the Premier League in 1992, BBC and BSkyB paid £214m for five seasons. This had risen to £743m in 1996 (Parry 2001: 217-219). Then in 2009, the Premier League TV-deal had spiralled to £1.78bn.¹

Despite this, Henry Winter claims in *the Daily Telegraph* that "English football faces significant anxieties, from Wembley's finances to the indebtedness of Manchester United and Liverpool to players' wages, questionable owners, the crisis in the Academy system and the cost of watching matches in person and on satellite."²

The president of the European Football Association (UEFA), Michel Platini, is worried too. In November 2007, he criticized the number of foreign players, managers and owners in the English League. Platini stressed:

[...] the importance of national and local identity expressed through clubs – and he was suspicious of the cruder aspects of capitalism. This was equally evident in his distaste for foreign ownership. "I am totally against the philosophy in England today when Americans are buying clubs, not because they love football but because of money," he said. "I think that [Roman] Abramovich loves football. But I think that many other people are coming into English football who know nothing about the game – they

¹ Harris, Nick. 2009. "£1.78bn: Record Premier League TV deal defies economic slump" in *The Independent*: <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/163178bn-record-premier-league-tv-deal-defies-economic-slump-1569576.html> Downloaded 22.01.2010. 17:24.

² Winter, Henry. 2008. "Newcastle supporters make their voice heard and Liverpool fans follow suit" in *the Telegraph*: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/leagues/championship/newcastleunited/2965945/Newcastle-supporters-make-their-voice-heard-and-Liverpool-fans-follow-suit---Football.html> Downloaded 08.09.09. 11:47.

only know about profit. Football is part of the cultural heritage of the nation. How can an American or Chinese understand English football?”³

In February 2007, Liverpool Football Club was taken over by the Americans Tom Hicks and George Gillett. The club had been looking for potential investors for years. Their previous owner David Moores, a local business-man, had realised he no longer had the economic resources to bring the club forward. He wanted them to compete for titles, but the club had fallen behind in the ‘financial race’.

“When they [the Americans] came, I believed they would bring the club forward with a new stadium and money to get good players in,” a Liverpool supporter tells me two years later. The general feeling amongst the fans had been optimistic in 2007. That was to change soon.

A year later, I was in Liverpool. The home match against Sunderland was sold out, but I had been told that there might be a chance for a ticket if I went to the Liverpool Supporters’ Club. As I came inside, I was stopped by a fellow who was handing out leaflets. The leaflet urged the supporters to boycott the Club Shop. A protest-movement seemed to be on the steps.

Then, seven months later, the supporters organised a protest-march to voice their dissatisfaction with the American owners. They marched onto Anfield while shouting their throats sore: “WHAT DO WE WANT?! YANKS OUT!! – WHEN DO WE WANT IT?! NOW!!” The optimism was gone. Now the fans were expressing anger and frustration.

How to approach the study of football as a social phenomenon

Eduardo Archetti says that it is during the ninety minutes the match lasts we can observe the ‘main characters’ in the drama: the players, match officials, managers, coaches and the fans. Moreover, he claims that since football is played out on a public stage, we can understand this drama as an expression of this particular society’s culture (Archetti 1985: 143-146).

For a football match is more than ninety minutes. The match is at the core of something bigger, something that moves beyond the match, and consequently pervades

³ Syed, Matthew. 2007. “Michel Platini keeps eye on ball in pursuit of united Europe” in *the Times*: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/football/european_football/article2866140.ece. Downloaded 08.09.09. 10:00.

British society. Through the game of football, people understand who they are, opposed to other clubs, cities and regions.

The people of Liverpool say the city is “in England, but not of it”. In chapter two, we will learn why Liverpoolians view themselves as different from the rest of the country. This is central in order to understand the importance of football for the Scousers’ identity and self-assertion.

Football is played at hundreds of stadiums across the country every weekend. It is difficult to think of any other sphere of life where people’s attachment to a particular activity becomes as apparent as on a Saturday afternoon:

Football support in Britain has long been one of the most obvious activities at which men have exhibited those emotions they would be reluctant to demonstrate elsewhere. In their shared enthusiasms of the match day, men can hug each other, dance together, and unashamedly sing, shriek or cry in each other’s company – activities largely avoided elsewhere in their daily lives (Armstrong and Young 2000: 176).

For some it is mainly viewed as a form of entertainment. For others, it permeates their lives. Their whole existence is dependent on whether their team win or lose. No doubt, supporters involve themselves in football communities with varying degrees of commitment and enthusiasm. In chapter three, we will get an idea of what it means to be a football fan. During five months in Liverpool, and the occasional trip to neighbouring cities, I tried to get a grip on why this sport captivates the mind and soul of so many in Britain – the country where the game has its roots.

Victor Turner argues that it is in the state of ‘liminality’ that a sense of ‘communitas’ comes into existence (Turner 1991: 95-96). On match-day people step out of their everyday lives and prepare for the drama. Every fan has his own way of getting ready for the match. Some dress up in team colours and some do not. Some go to the pub before and after the match, and some do not. Being a football fan can be a thousand different ways of doing things, and of the forty-five thousand who attend the match in Liverpool on a Saturday afternoon, there are undoubtedly differences amongst the fans, even though they are supporting the same team. One might argue that football is not a ‘liminal’ phase as such, because it pervades every aspect of life for the football fan. It is rather in the ecstasy of a goal or an important win that differences are suspended and ‘communitas’ shows itself in its purest form. In this sense, a community of football fans should rather be regarded as an ‘imagined community’ because it consists of people who have never known one another, but are brought together as they carry with them an “image of their communion” (Anderson 1983: 15).

Though, having claimed that it is only in the moment of celebration that homogeneity occurs, it can also be said that it is in this very instance that this image of communion is reinforced.

In this community, football fans mainly become more like ‘others like themselves’ through interaction of different sorts. But the media plays a significant part in linking people together too. It forms and cements one’s self-understanding as one learns to be part of something bigger. In this way “[t]his Being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Dasein [self] completely into the kind of Being of ‘the Others’, in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more” (Heidegger 1973: 164 [*My insertion*]).

Newspapers are full of stories about football. Pre-match build-ups, match reports, interviews, transfer rumours and so on fill the sports pages every day. On TV, football-news is spewed out by the hour on Sky Sports News. Almost every night there is a match on. On the radio you can listen to live-coverage of these or ‘call-in-programmes’ where football fans from all over the country express their views on every rumour or happening in the game. From a different angle, fanzines pose humoristic, sarcastic and critical views.

In this sense, it might be more fitting to view a community as a social phenomenon that exists on different levels and amongst different kinds of people. Football fans are part of the same community on different terms and their sense of belonging is informed through their nerve-ends and activities as well as through the imagination of a community “conceived of as a deep horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1983: 16).

This sense of belonging is enhanced when they play their rivals. Football is about winning and feeling superior. Without this competitive character, the significance of football would surely be next to nothing. Liverpool FC was born out of a conflict between Everton FC and the land-owner. Once regarded as the ‘friendly derby’, the Merseyside-derby is now viewed as a bitter affair by the local supporters. We will deal with the local rivalry in chapter four.

Football is one of the spheres of life where this meeting with ‘the other’ is a frequent happening. Every weekend football supporters are faced with ‘the others’ of varying intensity. But the local rivals become the most important ‘other’ as these are the people one encounters in everyday life as well. In this sense, Claude Levi-Strauss’ elaborations on what he believes to be ‘the unconscious foundations of social life’ (Levi-Strauss 1993: 18) might be useful in order to understand how football supporters’ identity is played out and negotiated in the meeting with others because this ‘binary structure’ refers to the *relationship* between people

(Levi-Strauss 1993: 161). So as these encounters help people understand who they are in relation to what they definitely are not, it follows that these help them structure their 'being-in-the-world' as well, because:

[...] this phenomenon itself always gets 'seen' in a certain way in every Dasein [self]. And thus it gets 'seen' *because* it makes up a basic state of Dasein [self], and in every case is already disclosed for Dasein's [self's] understanding of Being, and disclosed along with that Being itself (Heidegger 1973: 85 [My insertion]).

Whether this way of thinking in oppositions is a universal deeper structure of the human mind or not, is not as important for us here as it is to understand how this way of dual thinking is *expressed* when dealing with football rivalries. For it would seem that the concept of community contains two characteristics. On the one hand, people have an idea of who 'we' are, and on the other, they have an idea of who 'they' are. This is understood through the use of symbolic boundaries (Cohen 1993: 12).

Even though people get an understanding of who they are through the encounters with their own kind and shared activities, Barth argues that it is rather through one's interaction with others that one's self-understanding becomes most apparent (Barth 1969: 10). In other words, through such encounters people become more aware of the community to which they feel a sense of belonging. So we need to look at the boundaries between different groups of people because "[i]f a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion" (Barth 1969: 15). It follows then that people attach meaning to these boundaries and they become part of their 'being in the world'. How people perceive the relationship to their rivals is important in order to understand the significance of football in Liverpool as well as it brings us over to the problem of the football stadium in the commercialised world of football.

In the 1960s, Chief Secretary of Liverpool FC, Peter Robinson, proposed a ground-share between Everton FC and Liverpool FC. No one would listen to him back then. Then two decades later, plans were being worked out again. Although the plans have never materialised, it has not stopped others from trying. Every now and then it is suggested that the two teams from Merseyside should go for a shared stadium. Just as often it has been rejected, both by the fans and the two clubs. Instead, for years now, Liverpool has been talking about building their *own* stadium. There are plans to move from Anfield Road to Stanley Park because the club wishes to increase the capacity in order to keep up with the rich clubs in England and Europe. Joseph Maguire and Catherine Possamai argue that football clubs will lose some of their

identity if a stadium-move was effected because the emotional bond that supporters have with clubs is also linked to the stadium (Maguire and Possamai 2005: 43-44). Chapter five will look into the views and opinions on the stadium-issue.

The argument that a sporting-venue is just a venue for playing sports does not hold when it comes to understanding why football supporters become so passionate when the issue of stadium-moves and ground-sharing is brought up. The stadium does not exist “in itself and for itself, external to and indifferent to human affairs [because] space does not and cannot exist apart from the events and activities within which it is implicated” (Tilley 1994: 9-10). So to understand the feelings aroused when these issues are discussed, one must look beyond the steel and concrete and look at the significance and meaning the stadium has for people who ‘live’ there.

Tim Ingold says that “to adopt a perspective of this kind means bringing to bear the knowledge born of immediate experience, by privileging the understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvement in the world” (Ingold 2000: 189). People’s perception is always informed by their involvement with their surroundings and what the world looks like for them is neither relative nor accidental:

The things of the world are not simply neutral *objects* which stand before us for our contemplation. Each one of them symbolises or recalls a particular way of behaving, provoking in us reactions which are either favourable or unfavourable. This is why people’s tastes, character, and the attitude they adopt to the world and to particular things can be deciphered from the objects with which they choose to surround themselves (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 48).

So the physical world does not exist in itself, but through people’s ‘gaze’ (Merleau-Ponty 2008: 77-78). It is always informed by their own understanding of it. The world therefore “owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there” (Ingold 2000: 192). In this way, the activities in a ‘taskscape’ becomes an enactment of a particular culture, and by paying attention to what goes on there one can understand how people interact and ‘resonate’ with one another in specific places (Ingold 2000: 196).

Although the ‘taskscape’ only exists when it is performed, activities and movements make their mark on the physical surroundings. In this sense, the past is already there and it is understood through people’s perception of the ‘landscape’ (Ingold 2000: 198). So people are in fact performing an act of remembrance when they perceive their physical surroundings because places are “pregnant with the past” (Ingold 2000:189). Together the ‘taskscape’ and ‘landscape’ reveal what matters for the people living there, and it is from “this relational

context of people's engagement with the world [...] that each place draws its unique significance" (Ingold 2000: 192).

This phenomenological approach is founded on understanding how people experience the world and how their 'being-in-the-world' is expressed through the activities and events they attend to. Therefore the idea of a 'taskscape' can be related to Victor Turner's concept of 'communitas'. When people 'resonate' in their actions, a feeling of sameness and belonging comes into existence through participating in the same activities. It follows then, that how people perceive their surroundings and circumstances, are part of something bigger because it is through the shared activities and contexts that the foundation of sociality lies (Ingold 2000: 196).

A place then, gives you a sense of both the past and the present. In our case, the football stadium is where people meet every weekend. Their memories are contained in this place and these are constantly evoked as the people attend to their different activities on match-day. But the past and present is also understood through stories. Narratives help people know themselves and the world around them because "[...] the activity of narrating does not consist simply in adding episodes to one another; it also constructs meaningful totalities out of scattered events" (Ricoeur 1981: 278). Obviously, one can understand a lot from just observing the activities that go on around the stadium on match-day. But the history of the club, people's individual stories and stories that are part of folk-memory give you a deeper look into the fans' view of the world.

Different stories guide people in their daily lives. Time gets compressed when stories are told and members of a specific community learn about their way of living in the world because "[t]elling a story [...] [is] a way of guiding the listeners or readers *into* it" (Ingold 2000: 190). In stories people both reminisce the past and imagine the future, and, as a consequence, narratives connect people to the passage of time by placing them in history (Ricoeur 1981: 288). The past is brought to life again through stories because "what happens in remembering is that we relive earlier perceptions, [...] [w]e capture that earlier part of our [...] life [and] new dimensions of the object arise through memory" (Sokolowski 2000: 68-70).

It should be evident now that people perceive the objects of the world through their experience of it and this experience comes from living in this world. In other words, people understand the world through their 'gaze', but this 'being-in-the-world' is at the same time

inevitably influenced by their ‘being-with-one-another’ as people cope with the ‘here-and-now’ both through interacting with the world and each other as well as through the stories and memories they share. This is important when we look at how the fans experience the ownership situation in chapter six.

For the Liverpool supporters these days, the glorious past is set up against their fear for the future. The socialism preached by former manager Bill Shankly is resurrected in the fans’ resistance and together with different memories and stories it forms a collective narrative which helps shape and cement how the Scousers view themselves through a “style in which they are imagined” (Anderson 1983: 15). This collective narrative then becomes, in all its essence, a story the Scousers tell themselves about themselves (Geertz 2000: 448) where they emphasize how they are different from the owners.

Although the Americans had promised that they would *not*, they nevertheless *did* refinance their loan by transferring one-third of the debt onto the club. The fans now fear that the club will be ruined because the owners think most of their own profit. Traditionally, English clubs were owned by local merchants, industrialists and other people in power, who first of all had taken an interest in the game. Their main motivation was not to make money. They rather saw themselves as patrons and benefactors of the people and wanted to promote their hometown and club, in relation to rival clubs, cities and regions (Walvin 1994: 87-88).

Liverpool FC had been owned by the Moores-family for generations when the club was sold to the Americans. At first this buy-out was embraced by the fans. But time has made them realise that their initial impressions were wrong. David Harvey introduces the term ‘monopoly rent’ to explain how global capitalism works:

Monopoly rent arises because social actors can realize an enhanced income-stream over an extended time by virtue of their exclusive control over some directly or indirectly tradeable item which is in some crucial respects unique and non-replicable [and] because some social actors control some special quality resource, commodity or location which, in relation to a certain kind of activity, enables them to extract monopoly rents from those desiring to use it (Harvey 2001: 395).

To be owner of an English football club would seem to be the ideal object of purchase given the apparent addiction of football supporters as the capitalist is given the opportunity to squeeze them in their addiction. A fan’s football interest is not something he can simply do away with: “The significance of football lies primarily not in its financial value but rather in the fact that many individuals – particularly males – in English society have regarded it as critical to their lives” (King 2002: 16). But it should be noted that this is where addiction goes together with passion and commitment. It is not granted that the supporters will accept the

changes imposed by the owners. Therefore we need to examine how these changes are experienced by the fans. We have seen that the fans are upset. The question that remains is why the Americans have roused such strong reactions from the fans.

On the pitch, an increasing number of foreign players represent English football clubs. At the end of the day, the players are given the task of bringing joy and glory to the club and their fans. Today, Liverpool FC has only two local players who play regularly. What this means for the local supporters will be examined in chapter seven.

It should be clear that my concern here is to understand how these commercial changes affect the supporters of Liverpool Football Club. The stadium, the songs and the ritual activity on match-day contain symbols and activities that help people stick together. So given the recent developments in English football, I want to examine how fans experience, practice and negotiate their relationship with the club.

Reflections on method and data-collection

I have always had a vague ‘dream’ that someday I would get the chance of living in Liverpool for a shorter or longer period of time. The ‘dream’ finally started to materialise that day in February 2008. Doing a master’s degree in social anthropology had been an option for years, but I had not gone through with it because I had not found any area of study that had caught my interest. The idea hit me as this fellow handed me the leaflet. An image of a possible future was starting to take form. I had been in Liverpool several times before, but the opportunity had never really opened up before now. On the 5th of January 2009, I arrived in Liverpool to do my fieldwork. I stayed there until the 26th of May, two days after the 2008/09-season ended. I went to matches almost every weekend and sometimes in the midweek. I was living as a football fan for five months.

I am a Liverpool fan myself. This football interest quickly gave me access to the field and I could easily discuss football with anyone. In ‘football-talk’ people are constantly using references that a novice would have trouble understanding – let alone remember. In these conversations it is constantly referred to players, matches, managers, directors, other teams and football personalities, past and present. Not having such background-knowledge would have made it difficult for me to follow a regular conversation on football, especially given the short time-span of the fieldwork. I had never lived ‘the life of a football fan’ before, but this was effectively what I did this time. In this sense, my contact with the ‘field’ was very much

characterised by an ‘on-off-relationship’. But that being said, football is always right under the surface in Liverpool. It is an essential part of how people understand who they are. Everywhere I went the topic would soon change to football if we were not discussing it in the first place. I was interested in understanding how local supporters experience the changing face of English football. Not being a local, made me realise that football perhaps matters more for those fans who go to matches every week. And regardless of how the owners front their views in the media, this account focuses on the fans’ perception of recent developments in and around Liverpool Football Club.

My main arena for getting under the skin of the fans was the pubs around Anfield and on the bus to the away-games. I also sat down with some fans and interviewed them for a couple of hours or more. These were not interviews in the true sense of the word, they were more like conversations. Obviously I had questions I wanted them to answer, but they had every opportunity to elaborate on issues I had not planned for. Moreover, the days and nights in the pub on match-day, and the long days on the bus to away-matches, got me closer to understanding what it was all about. The bus would often leave at eight or nine o’clock in the morning. Not thinking, nor caring what time of day it was, we opened our first beer – and off we went. Before and after home games, the pub was the natural meeting-place. The whole existence as a student of anthropology ‘living’ with football fans was unavoidably influenced by the consumption of alcohol. It could not have been any other way. How can I say, then, that what follows gives any credible account of what is going on in Liverpool these days?

A written account can never give an exact depiction of reality. Still I believe that I have caught the essence in some way. Clifford Geertz says that “[c]ulture [...] is public [...] [t]hough ideational, it does not exist in someone’s head [but] they are things of this world.” (Geertz 2000: 16). It follows, then, that if culture is something that goes on ‘out there’ between people, it must be “equally true that these culturally orchestrated landscapes are also to be found inscribed as dimensions of the mind” (Shore 1996: 8). But these ‘landscapes’ have to be articulated and communicated in order to be part of culture. They have to be public. Therefore different acts, actions and activities are communicative.

But it is not enough to just observe people and involve oneself in their activities. In order to gain access to their thoughts one has to speak with them too. Through conversations and in-depth interviews one can better understand the thoughts of others because “the meaning of words [is understood] through their place in a context of action, and by taking part

in a communal life” (Merleau-Ponty 2008: 208). One specific speech-act, then, will have to be checked through conversations with other members of the same community in order to understand whether what one person says is simply part of a madman’s mind, or if it is a matter which is of concern for others as well. Through conversations we are able to gain access to other people’s thoughts and after a while we are able to “think *according to others* which enriches our own thoughts” (Merleau-Ponty 2008: 208). As a result, if I am speaking to others, then my own knowing of their thoughts will evolve and I can better understand them because “[t]he orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought” (Merleau-Ponty 2008: 209). This is essential because the actions of others need to be interpreted and what various acts mean would be best understood through a local explanation of it. But it is not always possible to get an explanation as it happens. So in order to understand better, time spent in a specific place is necessary, because it helps one gradually get a more plausible account of what different sorts of actions and utterances might mean.

Earlier we touched on how people’s ‘gaze’ determines how they understand what goes on around them. If we follow this thought, it might be argued that my ‘gaze’ is also influenced by how I see the world. My background would thus be colouring my perception. However, from living in a society other than one’s own for a longer period of time, one can learn how others perceive the world and how they go about doing different things that matter for them. Simply being there, though, is not enough as one can only be at one place at a time, and in every instance thousand things are happening elsewhere. Therefore a broader approach is needed.

Daily newspapers gave me a look into issues that were on the agenda both for fans and others involved in football. In the library, I searched old newspapers. Fanzines too, became an important source of information, as these are written by fans for fans. All this information I believe not only affected me, but also the Liverpool fans’ understanding of the situation. Things that were important for those I spoke with were also part of a more general understanding amongst the fans. Therefore I believe the following will be a credible account. My ‘gaze’ has in this sense changed during my stay on Merseyside, touching on both the local view of the present *and* the fear and worries about the future. Obviously, the fieldwork was an assemblage of ‘scattered events’, but from these I have tried to form a meaningful totality which hopefully will give an idea of what is going on in Liverpool. In any case, as Keith H. Basso claims: “[i]t is better to write of things one believes one knows something about than to

anguish in high despair over the manifold difficulties of knowing things at all” (Basso 1996: 111).

In 2007, the fans thought time had finally come for the club to get back to the very top of English football. Instead, three years later, they are looking at a club balancing dangerously on the edge of a cliff. The way the Americans have run the club has led to a very real fear amongst the fans that the club is on its way into a downward spiral. The fear is that the club will have to sell players to cover their debt or are forced into administration by the FA⁴ and get points deducted. This will eventually affect their league position and their chance to compete for titles and qualification for the Champions League.⁵ It is apparent that there is a clash of worldviews going on. The Americans have failed to understand the local ways and, as a consequence, the fans use the past as a resistance-strategy in order to change the present, and hopefully for them, the future. So maybe it is time to take a more critical stance regarding the recent developments in English football. Maybe the fans have a point when they want the Americans out. Maybe it is time to change the way this football club is organised.

But before we go too deeply into the matter, we need to understand what kind of place Liverpool is, in order to understand who these people are, and why football plays such an important role in this city because “parts are only understood against the background of appropriate wholes” (Sokolowski 2000: 4).

⁴ The Football Association.

⁵ The European Cup was restructured and renamed the Champions League in 1992. This restructuring meant that the top teams in Europe would compete for glory, first through group-stages, and then knock-out stages. Whereas the European Cup was a pure knock-out competition, the group stages in the Champions League meant that the teams would play more matches, and thus the potential for earning more money would be greater because of increased ticket-revenues and TV-money. In addition, more teams from the bigger leagues in Europe were allowed to join in. From England, the four best teams in the Premier League were allowed into the tournament, whereas earlier in the European Cup, only the League Champion was admitted.

2 Liverpool – the city and the people

Liverpool is situated on the edge of the land, with its back to England, where the river Mersey ends her journey, flowing all the way from the Pennines through Manchester and Warrington before it reaches the Irish Sea. The Mersey has always played a prominent role in the city's history. The people of Liverpool say that the city is "in England, but not of it". Why do the Liverpudlians feel different from the rest of the country? And what role does football play in this sense?

The history

More than eight hundred years ago there was almost nothing here. In the near distance one might have spotted a peasant, but there was nothing by the pool that could resemble as much as a village. Then in 1207, the king created "a new town complete with free men, certain trading rights and other royal privileges" (Aughton 2008: 6).

But it was not until the seventeenth century that Liverpool started to grow. The trade with Ireland increased and soon it expanded to include France and Spain. Then in 1666, the ship *Antelope* came back from Barbados with cargo. The following year, another ship arrived in Liverpool with sugar cane. Ten years later, twelve ships were trading with Barbados on a regular basis. Soon this trade was extended to the colonies in North America as the trade with tobacco proved even more valuable. A new world had opened itself to the merchants of Liverpool (Aughton 2008: 56).

The growing demand for colonial produce, both from Ireland and the neighbouring cities of Lancashire, increased the transatlantic trade which brought prosperity to the city of Merseyside. Docks were built, modernized and extended. The growth of the large manufacturing trades in Manchester, Bolton, Wigan and Preston meant that Liverpool was playing an ever more important role in importing and exporting goods for these trades. Suddenly, Liverpool was challenging Bristol to be the 'second port in England' (Aughton 2008: 61).

The trade that tipped the scale in Liverpool's favour was the slave trade. From the mid-eighteenth century, Liverpool became the leading participant in the slave trade. But this did not last long. The slave trade was abolished in 1807 so the merchants of Liverpool had to look elsewhere for trade. But they did not suffer from this as they "had already begun to

diversify in alternative commodities in the economic boom that followed the War of Independence” (Longmore 2008: 137). By the end of the nineteenth century, Liverpool was challenging London to become ‘the first port in the kingdom’ (Aughton 2008: 217).

People poured into Liverpool. The potato famine in the 1840s led to mass-migration from Ireland. Most of these migrants passed through the city on their way to America. Around 300,000 Irish arrived in Liverpool (Aughton 2008: 190). Many of them managed to make the journey across the Atlantic, but some did not and remained in Liverpool. People escaping political disturbance and poverty in Europe came too, in search of a better life in the New World. It is estimated that from 1819 to 1859, more than five million sailed to the United States. About two-thirds made the journey through Liverpool (Aughton 2008: 180-181).

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Great Depression set in. Lots of people lost their jobs. As late as 1939, the unemployment rate in the city was still twice the rest of the country. The activity around the docks was on the decline. Since the heydays at the turn of the century, Liverpool’s role as a major participant in the world of commerce had slowly started to lose its stake. Then came World War II (Aughton 2008: 243-244).

During the ‘May Blitz’ of 1941, the Germans literally bombed the city to bits. The Luftwaffe was systematically aiming to destroy every seaport in the country. Out of a total of 282,000 homes, 184,480 homes in Liverpool were damaged by the air-raids. 10,840 houses were completely destroyed. The city was on fire. The red sky of Liverpool lit up the night for neighbouring cities many miles away (Aughton 2008: 250, 253).

But the end of the war brought relief for the Liverpudlians. Liverpool FC won the first League Championship after the war. The economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s meant a better life for most people in the city. Young men signed on as sailors and travelled the world, bringing back influences from across the Atlantic (Aughton 2008: 255, 272-274). The American music-form of rock ‘n’ roll was to have a strong impact on life in Liverpool. Bands were formed, and the youth practised and performed in venues all over town. It was the ‘swinging sixties’ and the ‘Mersey Beat’ became a major contributor to the phenomenon (Murden 2008: 418-421).

The sixties proved a glorious time for football too. In 1959, Bill Shankly was appointed manager of Liverpool Football Club. Liverpool was struggling in the second division. Everton was back in the first division. In 1963, Everton won the League before Liverpool claimed the title in 1964 and then won the FA Cup in 1965. Everton was crowned

FA Cup Champions the following year and Liverpool won the League, again: “With football and music to the fore in the city, Liverpool in the ‘60s seemed like the very centre of the popular cultural universe” (Williams 2001a: 60).

But the port was struggling. ‘Containerization’ meant that cargo now was loaded and unloaded in factories far from the docks. The increase in airline-travel meant that the passenger ships travelling to America were losing the race as well. Deindustrialization and the decline of the port led to a decrease in population, from the peak of 855,000 in 1931 to only half that in the 1960s (Murden 2008: 429).

During the seventies and eighties the decline continued. The employment around the docks slowly vanished. In 1981, 20 per cent of the labour force was out of work (Murden 2008: 428). Margaret Thatcher’s government regarded the city as expensive, inefficient and badly run and believed the local authorities were incapable of solving the city’s problems. Consequently, the government completely cut the local authorities out of the regeneration process. But this overriding approach did not help matters. Unemployment continued to rise, and reports tell that in certain areas as many as half of the households were receiving supplementary benefit. In what has later been known as the ‘Toxteth riots’, the rough existence of inner-city-life in Liverpool exploded into an inferno, as a consequence of police harassment, unemployment, racial discrimination and poverty (Murden 2008: 439).

More distress followed. Liverpool was struck by two football disasters during the 1980s. In 1985, thirty nine football supporters were killed before the European Cup Final in Brussels. Liverpool was to play Juventus at the Heysel Stadium when violence broke out. As a consequence, a wall at the badly maintained stadium collapsed and fell over the Italian supporters (Aughton 2008: 279).

In 1989, disaster struck again. Before the semi-final in the FA Cup between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest, too many supporters were directed into the same section of the terraces at Hillsborough in Sheffield. Years of neglect from the authorities concerning the security of fans and poor police work were to have disastrous consequences. In addition, the police failed to react in time. When mistaking the crush for a pitch invasion, the police kept pushing people back into the pens. Ninety six supporters were crushed to death (Scruton 1999).

The confidence was gone. Liverpool was now a battered city.

“We don’t really feel like a part of England”

Liverpool’s contact with sailors and merchants has made the city feel like an island in the midst of the industrial North. But the steady fall of the city’s fortunes has left its mark. The decline touched bottom in the 1980s. The docks were deserted and people were struggling to find work:

“The city was effectively destroyed by the government in the 1980s,” George explains, “and because of that, there is a natural mistrust of ‘southerners’ in the city. There is definitely an ‘us and them’ attitude with a lot of Scousers. Liverpool takes a lot of stick from the rest of the country like *The Sun* reports of Hillsborough.”⁶

Before I came to Liverpool in January, I had not realised how strongly this feeling of difference was felt by the citizens of Liverpool. A trip to Crewe made me realise that the city is viewed as somewhat different from the outside as well:

Crewe is about forty five minutes south from Liverpool by train. On this last Saturday in January I went to Gresty Road to watch Crewe Alexandra take on their local rivals Tranmere Rovers. Before today Crewe was struggling at the bottom of League One.⁷ Tranmere was fighting for a place in the Play-Offs.

I find my place amongst the home supporters behind one of the goals. The away fans are in the stand to the left of us. Crewe is the better side in the first few minutes of the match. Tranmere is pushed deep into their own half.

A Tranmere defender goes down after a scramble for the ball in the penalty area. The referee runs over to check if he is alright. When he stands next to him he is warned by a home supporter:

“HOLD ON TO YOUR WALLET, REFEREE!”

As the centre half gets up someone else shouts to the referee:

“CHECK YOUR POCKETS, REF!”

Other home fans applaud his comment.

⁶ Under the headline ‘The Truth’ *The Sun* published outrageous, unfounded allegations and fabricated stories which told that Liverpool supporters had urinated on police officers, stolen from victims and beaten up officers who were giving life-saving treatment. But the truth of the matter is that years of neglect from the government, the police and the clubs concerning the safety of football fans eventually led to this tragedy. The authorities were covering their backs. For further insight, read Phil Scraton’s *Hillsborough: The Truth* (1999).

⁷ The third highest level in the English league system.

The Crewe supporters sing degrading songs about Scousers and Merseyside – often as a reaction to the Tranmere supporters singing “GOING DOWN, GOING DOWN, GOING DOWN!”

The Crewe supporters reply by singing “SIGN ON! SIGN ON! WITH THE BILL IN YOUR HAND! AND YOU’LL NEVER GET A JOB!” implying that most Scousers are out of work.

Suddenly the Tranmere fans start clapping when the home supporters sing “IF YOU ALL HATE THE SCOUSERS – CLAP YOUR HANDS!!”

A fellow behind me turns to his mate and says:

“They’re not really Scousers, are they? They’re from Birkenhead.”

But this does not stop the home crowd from mocking the visiting fans:

“IF YOU CAN’T TALK PROPER THEN SHUT UP!”

They keep throwing abuse at the away players.

“YOU FUCKING THIEVING BASTARDS!” is heard every time the home fans feel things are not going their way.

Back in Liverpool, Harry blames the media for the city’s reputation in the rest of the country:

I think the main reason for Liverpool’s reputation in the rest of England is the fault of the media. You know, the two media centres in England are in Manchester and London. Every time the media get the chance to say something negative about Liverpool they don’t let that chance go away.

He goes on blaming former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, for the rough times the people of Liverpool have had to go through: “It all started during the eighties with the Thatcher-government. Because of her lots of people in Liverpool lost their jobs and after a long time of struggling many finally had no choice but to move away in search for work.”

The eighties have left deep scars. Another fellow confirmed what I had already heard:

We feel separate as we are treated as outcasts because of un-researched bad press that accuse us of being thieves and burglars. Of course, there are those types here, but no more than elsewhere. This type of things stick and the perception in the rest of the country is that Scousers cannot be trusted.

All this has led to a suspicious attitude towards visitors: “We don’t like people coming here complaining about how torn down and poor Liverpool is,” Matt says. “We all know that. The thing is – we don’t really feel like a part of England.”

But the feeling of difference goes further. The people of Liverpool have a rather distinct dialect, which clearly differs from neighbouring cities and the rest of the country

because of their special pronunciation. The Scouse-dialect has given name to the Liverpudlians. (Belchem, 2006: 33-36). But the origin of the term is Scandinavian: “In fact Scouse derives from a Scandinavian meal brought over by sailors called ‘lobscouse’,” one fellow tells me.

At first, the Scouser-term was a label on Irish immigrants living in the poorer areas of the city. But when the dialect had established itself, it flourished in the heart of the city and became a term for anyone coming from Liverpool. The dialect became important because it differentiated the Liverpudlians from neighbouring cities and it soon grew to be a symbol of resistance, collective solidarity and a sense of humour (Belchem, 2006: 33, 45-46).

How is this feeling of difference expressed through football?

In 1993, Liverpool was ‘awarded’ European Union Objective One status which meant that they would receive funding to regenerate the city. Today, the docks and the waterfront have been brought back to life, refurbished and renovated, to receive tourists and visitors from all over the world. In 2008, Liverpool hosted the ‘Capital of Culture’.⁸ The city and its people had something to be proud of again.

Three years earlier, one million people gathered around St Georges Hall to celebrate the homecoming of ‘the Miracle of Istanbul’. Liverpool became legendary with their famous comeback against AC Milan in the Champions League final. Having been three nil down at half-time, the Reds fought back to win on penalties. This epic football match almost stands out as an allegory of the revival of the city, of how Liverpool have pulled together through torrid times and come back as a European city to be reckoned with in the new millennium.

The Scousers are proud of where they come from and they find a special joy in their difference. “This perception of difference is reinforced by the position and character of the city in various aspects of popular culture, of which the tradition of supporting football is one of the most high-profile” (Boyle 2001: 46):

The morale was on top back from Portsmouth. “ARE WE HUMAN?! OR ARE WE SCOUSERS?!!”

⁸ Liverpool was awarded the European Capital of Culture by the European Union in 2008. Through one year the city was given the chance to show their cultural life and cultural development to the rest of Europe.

The lyrics from the song Human by the Killers is spontaneously changed by the lads.

“WE’RE NOT ENGLISH – WE ARE SCOUSERS!”

The match is over and we are back on the bus. Music is thundering from the sound system. We have just witnessed an amazing turn-around by Liverpool in the last five minutes. First, Fernando Torres equalised, before Dirk Kuyt somehow managed to find the net from a tight angle. Liverpool win 3-2 and are top of the table.

The singing plays on this difference. The ‘dehumanisation’ is reversed in the song-text. We might not be human, they say, but at least we are not English. It is evident that English football clubs do have deep roots in their local communities. The Scousers take pride, not only in their difference, but in their football as well. Liverpool has been the most successful club in England for a long time. Everton, too, is one of the most merited clubs in England.

So even though the city has been through rough times, success on the pitch has always given the Scousers a sense of superiority. It has given them the chance to think of themselves as better than, as well as different from, their neighbouring cities and the capital in the south: “We are Scouse, not English,” one fellow explains. “We feel were Scousers and that’s it. England doesn’t really come into it”.

3 Why football?

If you make a ball out of rags or plastic bags, gather some friends, find an open space, whether a patch of dirt, grass or tarmac, decide upon teams, put down stones, bottles, clothes or whatever for goalposts and agree upon where the boundaries of the playing-field should be, you are ready to play a game of football. Simple rules and no expensive equipment have made this game the most popular sport in the world.

For most people, though, the chance of becoming a professional footballer stays a childhood dream. They are relegated to amateur footballers and spectators. However, this is just another way of participating in the ‘beautiful game’.⁹ For it is evident that it is not only the glamour and drama of the Premiership and the Champions League that makes people spend several hours every week playing, watching, thinking and talking football.

How can a *game* be so important for so many people?

The history of football

Football originated in Britain, but different ball-games have been played around the globe for centuries. Some even claim to have been kicking the ball for thousands of years. How can we say, then, that it is a British game?

Historical sources tell of several kicking games in China. *Cuju*, *Bai Da* and *Zhu Qiu* were played in different historical periods. *Cuju* was played under the Han-dynasty two hundred years BC. Two teams played each other on a marked pitch. Handling and tackling was allowed, but kicking was an important part of the game too. The *Bai Da*-game followed in the footsteps of *Cuju*. Although the rules might have changed, *Bai Da* remained a game played against two goals. In *Zhu Qiu*, the game seems to have been played with only one goal. The objective was to pass the ball around until one player got the opportunity to shoot. If the shooter missed, his team could still keep possession if they managed to retain the ball in the air. If the ball touched the ground, the other side would get possession. In the Malay Peninsula, they played a game which was a mix of football and volleyball. It was known as *Sepak Raga* and drew its inspiration from the Chinese games. In Japan, a game called *Kemari* was played from the twelfth century. The point here was to keep the ball in the air as long as

⁹ The expression was first coined by the Brazilian footballer Didi, who played for the national team in the 1950s and 1960s. The phrase is translated from the Brazilian term ‘Joga bonito’.

possible. In Australia, Aborigines had been playing a kicking-game called *Marn Gook* for thousands of years. On the Pacific Islands, they had their own kicking-games and in Latin America different team games involved kicking the ball, although it generally also included the use of bats (Goldblatt 2006: 6-8).

In Europe, though, ball-games did not seem to be that popular. In the ancient Olympics they were competing in athletics, archery, wrestling and chariot-racing. The most similar event to today's football-spectacle was that of the Coliseum in Rome. The stadium could take 50,000 people, but these sporting spectacles never involved a ball. As the Roman Empire went under, so did the spectacle. We would not see anything like this again before cities started to grow to the same size in the nineteenth century (Goldblatt 2006: 13-15).

In Medieval Europe, sports were the leisure activities of the ruling classes. The most crucial thing for them was to defend their territory and secure the feudal order. The activities they played and practiced were those which would prepare them for war. A knight would not kick a ball. He fought wars and he was most at home on horseback. Therefore the most common activities were games of chivalry, archery and hunting. But in one corner of Europe, a game known as 'folk football' was played. This area had never really been colonized by the Romans. Nor were they ruled by feudal lords and the influence from Christianity had not eradicated the traditional festivals and rituals of these Celtic communities in the North-West (Goldblatt 2006: 15).

What characterised 'folk football' was that it was played over long distances. Often villages would play each other. Two teams were fighting to get the ball to a particular place. The ball was carried or kicked amongst the participants and no distinction was made between players and spectators. The games often turned into very violent affairs. Knives and other weapons were used and the occasional death was inevitable. Because of the game's violent nature, there were scores of injuries and damage to property (Walvin 1994: 13). Consequently, different ecclesiastical and secular authorities banned the game. But they allowed it to be played at certain times of year, often in connection with religious celebrations. In that way they hoped to please the masses. But these attempts failed to stop people from playing. History tells of several instances where participants were fined for playing the game (Goldblatt 2006: 17-18).

This was the game that eventually would evolve into modern-day football. And as David Goldblatt argues, when it comes to deciding the origins of football, it is not who kicked

the ball first that matters, but who played the game “at the moment of modernization” (Goldblatt 2006: 9). But football was by no means the only sport emerging in Britain in the nineteenth century. In fact, boxing, rowing, horse racing and cricket were the first sports that underwent a ‘bureaucratisation’-process (Goldblatt 2006: 21-22). In the same period, football was regarded as vulgar by different religious groups and urban professionals. Their disapproval of popular pleasure was based on their view that personal danger and unregulated violence was unavoidable. This meant that ‘folk football’ only survived in remote areas, but also in institutions where religious groups and urban professionals had no influence. These institutions were the public schools (Walvin 1994: 30).

Since fighting was prevalent in these schools, the teaching staff realised they needed something that would direct the boys’ energies elsewhere. It was believed that games would be good for building character. Because of this insistence on playing the game in public schools, football evolved behind closed doors at different schools throughout the country. Therefore slightly different rules on how to play the game evolved (Walvin 1994: 33). Eventually the schools would play each other and they needed to agree on which rules to follow. Obviously this led to disputes. The major conflict was between those schools who had developed a kicking game and those who were allowed to handle and run with the ball (Goldblatt 2006: 29).

Finally, in 1863, a meeting was held at the Freemasons’ Tavern in central London. Agreement was not reached. After a series of meetings over a period of two months, it became clear that there were irreconcilable differences on whether it should be a catch-and-run-game or a kicking-game. The final division came in 1871 when the clubs in favour of handling broke away and formed Rugby Football Union. Football was finally a sport of its own (Goldblatt 2006: 31-32).

In 1872, the FA Cup was set to take place, the first national tournament. From this point on, the game became more and more popular. The amateur teams from the south dominated this early period, but that was about to change. The growing industrial cities in the north soon became a ‘hotbed’ for football. Large crowds would go and watch football in their spare time, and by doing this, the clubs earned considerable sums from match-day revenues. As a result, the clubs of the north began to pay wages to their players. The teams in the south were opposed to this because they felt it would destroy the spirit of the game. Nevertheless, the dominance of the teams from the south was overcome in 1883, when Blackburn Olympic

beat Old Etonians by two goals to one in the FA Cup final. Football had become a professional sport (Goldblatt 2006: 38, 43-44).

But there was no national league and the 'fixture list' had no regularity to it. Different tournaments were organised and the clubs played friendly matches. They went on tours and played against more or less random opponents. Sometimes a team would turn up for a match, only to find that the other team had found a more interesting match to play (Goldblatt 2006: 55-56).

William MacGregor, a member of the board at Aston Villa, was concerned about how one could secure more predictable income for the clubs. In 1888, he called a meeting where he proposed to start a league with ten or twelve of the most prominent clubs in England. The teams would play each other regularly at home and away through a season. In April, the meeting was held in Manchester. MacGregor's proposal went through, and the attending clubs agreed upon forming The Football League. With the League and Cup established, the competitive nature of the game had been decided (Walvin 1994: 85-86).

Football quickly established itself as the 'people's game'. The working-men of the industrial north had taken to the sport. The industrialists and merchants owning the clubs had found a way to keep the clubs economically viable. This combination was to make football the most popular game in Britain along with the fact that: "the supreme appeal of football lay almost certainly in its expression of a sense of civic pride and identity" (Holt 1992: 166).

Grassroots-football

Despite this, I sometimes wonder why on earth people bother to come and watch non-league football for two hours on a bitterly cold January night. Twenty two players run around, kicking each other and sometimes the ball – if they are lucky – screaming at team-mates, the opponents and the referee. There is absolutely no flair, only struggle for the ball. The ball is kicked high up in the air as soon as they can get hold of it. Late tackles fly in whenever they are anywhere near an opposing player.

The pitch is muddy and the ball bounces uncontrollably. It seems like the crowd gets most excited or upset every time the referee blows his whistle: "FUCK OFF REF! HE GOT THE BALL!" or "THE REFEREE'S A BASTARD!" or even worse "THE REFEREE'S A

WANKER!!” When the referee gives your team the odd free kick the crowd erupts in a sarcastic cheer.

The game was not a very good one. Nevertheless people turn up in their thousands. Yesterday’s attendance at the Racecourse Ground counted 3,103 people. Not bad for a fifth division tie in January between Wrexham and Cambridge United in the Blue Square Premiership.¹⁰

Why is it that grown men go completely mental when they enter the realm of football? And how can a football club create so strong feelings in people? Hopefully the next few pages will give us an idea:

The home team is pushed back on the pitch now and their supporters shout instructions to them:

“PUSH OUT!” (the team must come out of defence)

“GET IT OUT!” (the ball)

“HIT HIM!” (they must tackle)

“FUCKING KILL HIM!” (when the home team still cannot get hold of the ball)

The frustration grows amongst the home fans. They start calling their own players “DICKHEADS!”

And if that does not help: “FUCKING DICKHEADS!!”

Then the home team is able to get hold of the ball. They pass it out to the left wing. The instructions continue:

“CONTROL IT! – MOVE AROUND! – EASY! – PASS IT!”

Then the inevitable misplaced pass comes.

“YOU GOTTA HIT IT HARDER, YOU DICKHEAD!”

The supporters are furious.

Suddenly the whole crowd gets an unexpected uplifting as one of their players goes past one defender, then another.

“GO ON! GO ON!! GO ON!!! – GET IT IN!! – SHOOT!!!”

¹⁰ The Blue Square Premiership is the fifth highest level in the English division system. It is the highest level outside the Football League but the champion is directly promoted to the league system.

Everybody gets up. This optimism is most of the time followed by an expected but disappointed “OOHHH!” and a short applause.

But sometimes the effort is a good one: “WOAHHH!!”

Everyone get on their feet... then sit down again when they realise the shot has gone wide.

1-0 comes after a scramble in the penalty area. The ball comes back out to Jon Brown twenty yards from goal. He hits it, not very hard, it seems to take ages before the ball bounces into the left hand corner. The crowd are waiting in anticipation and it takes a while before they realise the ball is actually in the net. Suddenly they are all on their feet.

The stadium erupts in a loud roar:

“YEEEAHH!!” followed by “WREXHAM DRAGONS FC! - IS BY FAR THE GREATEST TEAM THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN!!”

The game calms down again. The crowd does not. Again the referee is at the centre of attention. Cambridge’s central defender gets a free kick near the touch line. He steals a couple of yards. The crowd is quickly on their feet, shouting at the referee. The referee is told to ‘inform’ Phil Bolland, the central defender, to put the ball back.

The referee does not respond. The crowd keeps shouting, but still no response from the referee. An old fellow with his slicked down, bryl-creemed hairstyle keeps on when everyone else has sat down again.

When he cannot get his attention, he sits down disappointed, shaking his head, screaming:

“FOR GOD’S SAKE!!!”

Two minutes later, the same Bolland gets a throw-in at almost the same spot as the free kick. Again he steals a couple of yards. The old man with his fifties hairdo is on his feet again:

“CHEATER! CHEATER! YOU BLOODY CHEATER!!”

Bolland, hearing all of it, shakes his head in disbelief and just does not bother with the abuse. The old man tries yet again to get the referee’s attention, but still no luck.

“JESUS CH-R-R-IST!!! WHY DON'T SWAP WITH YOUR LINESMAN?!”

He sits down and continues to express his frustration to his friend.

In the second half Wrexham-striker Jeff Louis scores to secure a 2-0 win for the home side.

Surely there is something strange about the behaviour of football fans, about how they become so engaged in a seemingly unimportant midweek match between two mediocre sides. Yet, there is no doubt that this match meant something for them. Football *is* important for the British. Still this experience did not give me any answers as to *why* it is so important. This was a non-league mid-table encounter. It was freezing cold and the rain was always threatening to pour down. Needless to say, the entertainment value was limited. Despite this, more than three thousand turned up. More than fifty supporters had even come from Cambridge to support their team in Wales on a cold Thursday night.

Arthur Hopcraft explains that “[t]he point about football in Britain is that it is not just a sport people take to, like cricket or tennis or running long distances. It is inherent in the people” (Hopcraft 2006: 9). People do not go to football matches just to be entertained or to kill time:

There is more eccentricity in deliberately disregarding it than in devoting a life to it [...] No player, manager, director or fan who understands football, either through his intellect or his nerve-ends, ever repeats that piece of nonsense trotted out mindlessly by the fearful every now and again which pleads, ‘After all, it’s only a game’ (Hopcraft 2006: 9).

The example above shows that it matters. The isolated incident between the old man and Cambridge United’s central defender would be absurd to the outsider, but for those who go to matches every weekend it *is* important.

The old man’s reaction to the free-kick and throw-in situations is evidence of that. For him it might be of vital importance where the free-kick or throw-in is taken. It has to do with who cheats and who wins. The old man was doing everything he could to influence the referee and put the opposition off their game. He wanted Bolland to put the ball back and he probably wanted the referee to book him. Shouting like a madman from the stand, he surely felt he was taking part. At the same time, he told Bolland he was not welcome, that he was playing away from home and that bending the rules would not be tolerated from him in any way. But why so angry?

Hopcraft explains that “[w]hat happens on the football field matters, not in the way that food matters but as poetry does to some people and alcohol does to others: it engages the

personality” (Hopcraft 2006: 9). The reason is that “[t]he people own this art in the way they can never own any form of music, theatre, literature or religion because they cannot be fooled in it as they can in these other things [...]” (Hopcraft 2006: 9-10). This is ‘the people’s game’ where “[t]he crowds can be vindictive and brutal, but they can seldom be deceived” (Hopcraft 2006: 10). The fans know the rules, and they will never renounce their heartfelt right to tell you that.

Football at the top

It is a far cry from the muddy pitch at the Racecourse Ground to the glorious fields of Istanbul where Liverpool became legendary with their famous comeback against AC Milan in 2005. I am with some friends in *the Sandon*.¹¹ Darren and Matt were in Istanbul. Alan did not go. The other two give him some stick for it.

“I wanted to go, of course, but I couldn’t. I was skint.” I can see that he regrets it. The Merseysiders won the European Cup for the first time since 1984. Darren tells me he was actually thinking about leaving at half-time, but was persuaded by his friends to stick around for another ten or fifteen minutes. Liverpool turned it all around, and victory makes people do strange things. Darren tells a story from the stadium:

There was some kind of opening ceremony on the pitch and everybody stood on their seats to get a view of what was going on. A fellow sitting behind me told me to get off my seat so he could see too. “But then I won’t see,” I told him. This guy kept complaining and I just got tired of his moaning. I turned around and told him: “Hey, look! Fuck off!!” Then the game kicked off and you know the score. When Dudek saved that penalty from Shevchenko, the crowd went mad. Everybody was all over the place, jumping up and down, hugging whoever they could find. Suddenly I found myself hugging another man. After a short while I realised who it was. It was the very same fellow I had told to ‘fuck off’ before the game.

A couple of days later, I meet up with Harry. He used to work as a taxman, but he is retired now. Football has always been an important part of his life. Harry was in Istanbul too, with his youngest son:

It’s the greatest experience I’ve ever had. And I was in Rome in 1984. Through my whole life as a Liverpool supporter, I’ve never experienced anything like that. I told my son that he has now, by the age of 14, reached the pinnacle of his support for Liverpool. It will never be as good as that.

Football is so important for Harry that it has sometimes given him trouble in his love-life:

¹¹ A pub in the Anfield area, a couple of hundred yards from Liverpool FC’s home ground. This was where the football club was established. In the early days *the Sandon Hotel* was used as changing-rooms for the players, the supporters gathered here for a pint before the match, and the Club’s offices were situated here. The hotel was owned by John Houlding, the founder of Liverpool FC.

My first wife asked me who I loved the most, Liverpool or her. I love you the most, I told her. Of course, I lied. HAHHAHA!! My second wife has never posed the question. She just asked me if I loved the club. She probably knows who I love the most and has therefore never asked. HAHHAHA!!

A football match will definitely affect his mood: "I still get the same feeling when we lose. It ruins my weekend. And when we win I will be equally happy. I know it's a bit stupid, but it's how it is. It's been like this my whole life and the feelings remain the same. Actually, I think it has become worse over the years."

There was a scare in Harry's life when his oldest son started to go across the Mersey to watch Tranmere Rovers from Birkenhead. "My son had a flirt with Tranmere in the nineties. Do you remember John Aldridge?" he asks me, but continues before I can even think of an answer:

He used to play for Liverpool, but in the nineties he was first playing for and then was the manager of Tranmere Rovers. He had gotten a really good side together. I was a bit worried. Fortunately it didn't last long. And finally I managed to get him over to our side again.

I am with Harry in a coffee shop. He wanted to go for a coffee because he does not drink anymore:

I don't go to the pub before matches. I just go the match. I take my youngest son and we go the match. And that's it. After the match we go home. When I was younger, though, I used to meet my mates for a couple of pints before and after the match. Before the match we discussed the team selection. After the match we basically decided upon the team for next week's match. It was nice to have a natter after the game. We just talked rubbish, really. Beer is a very important part of football, I guess, but some people get really drunk. I don't understand that. Even in Istanbul some people were so drunk that it would surprise me if they even remember that they were there. It's strange that they spend all this money on this kind of game and then drink their senses away.

Back at *the Sandon* we are buying rounds of beer. I try to get my head around why people are so obsessed with this game.

"I guess it's like a tribal thing," Darren says. "Yeah, it's all about the community," Matt adds before Darren takes over again: "When you come to watch a football match, it doesn't matter what kind of background you're coming from." Alan does not quite agree. "It's a working class sport though," he says. Darren is on terms with Alan on this, although he points out that: "It's becoming more and more of a middle class thing now." Matt still hangs on to his initial view. "You know, when we won the European Cup, over a million turned up at St George's Hall to congratulate the team when they came back with the trophy from Istanbul. It sort of, like, brings the people together."

Phil from Ireland comes over for every home match. I meet him at *the Albert*.¹² Peter, a local, is there with him. They try to explain why they spend so much time on football. Phil

¹² *The Albert* is a pub just outside the stadium.

has trouble 'staying alive' during the 'football-free' summer-break. But when pre-season¹³ starts he is at ease again. "It might sound a bit weird, but a pre-season match against Tranmere Rovers can be really exciting. After a long summer with no football, time has finally come. That's when you meet all these lads again," he explains while looking at all his friends in the pub. Peter was once asked by his sister why he did not go on holiday:

You are spending all your time on football she was complaining. She asked me why I wanted to spend every weekend watching football instead of saving up money to go abroad on a proper holiday. The reason is that I don't have to. As a football fan I travel all the time. And when I am here I meet people from all over Europe. The Belgians, the Scandinavians and people from Spain, people from all over the place, they all come here.

He is clearly happy he has not followed his sister's advice.

Some supporters are so interested in football that they do not even have time to play the game themselves. Although in his late teens, Michael does not play football because he is tied up every weekend supporting Liverpool: "It's something to look forward to and something to be proud of. I wouldn't know what I would be doing if I didn't have football," he tells me. "It's not a hobby. It's a being. Some people might find it strange that football means that much to me, but that's just who I am..."

It is obvious that football is an intrinsic part of who people believe themselves to be and it pervades every aspect of their lives. On Merseyside, people are either 'red' or 'blue'. The city is divided when it comes to football. Next we will look at the relationship between Everton and Liverpool fans.

¹³ During this period the teams prepare for the season through hard training-sessions and friendly-matches in England and elsewhere.

4 Football on Merseyside

The people of Liverpool have their backs to England. “We are Scousers, not English,” they say. Below I will look at the relationship between the supporters of Liverpool FC and Everton FC. This is also important when we discuss the stadium-issue in the next chapter. The football clubs play an important role in how the Scousers understand themselves. Apparently, the so-called ‘friendly-derby’ has turned sour. Even families are split in two. Alan Edge remembers what life was like growing up with relatives on both sides of the divide:

A clash of colours was an inevitable feature of these family gatherings and, with my priorities at that time being focused almost entirely on footy, it was the part of the evening I most loved. As the drink began to wield its influence and peel away any of the few remaining veneers of sobriety, everyone’s true colours would be revealed, until all present had their feet firmly in one camp or the other. There was no neutral ground. At first, the rivalry might limit itself to light hearted argument and debate; occasionally, it went no further than that. Most times, it erupted into a wonderfully boisterous and spontaneous exaltation of our Redness and Blueness, as song followed insult and both Red and Blue factions, young and old, arms draped around each other, defiantly proclaimed their respective allegiances, with neither side giving so much as an inch. With everyone linked by blood and friendship, but divided by colour, the occasions came to represent a celebration of that special football heritage which blossomed in a hotbed such as ours (Edge 2007: 101).

One city, one people, two football clubs. The Scousers are divided among themselves. Why has the relationship gone sour?

Theoretical approach

People living in modern societies keep referring to their sense of belonging and sameness. Who ‘we’ are is inevitably part of people’s understanding of what they are not, and subsequently how they perceive those who are *not* ‘us’. The concept of community, thus, contains two characteristics, namely what makes ‘us’ similar, and what makes ‘them’ different. This is understood through the use of symbolic boundaries. These boundaries can be given different features in social life, like ethnicity, class, religion (Cohen 1993: 12) or, as in this case, by supporting a football team.

People attach meaning to these boundaries and they become part of people’s experience. But since the boundaries are symbolic constructs they may be interpreted differently, which eventually means that people who employ them can fill them with their own understandings. So, as symbols are shared within a group, this does not necessarily mean that the members attach the same meaning to them (Cohen 1993: 15). What is certain, though, is that the way people perceive these symbols, and how they come into play, are

consequences following ‘our’ social interaction with ‘them’, in one way or the other (Barth 1969: 10).

Below we will hopefully, through the two clubs’ ‘shared’ history and stories shared with me, get a glimpse of how the relationship between the clubs has evolved through the years, in ‘flashes’, from the early days up until today. The fans tell their stories according to the significance they give them in their understanding of the relationship between the two clubs. The stories show how people in Liverpool weave their ‘webs of significance’ (Geertz 2000: 5) when they negotiate their relationship to ‘the other’. Some stories are obviously part of folk-memory, but people also carry with them their own stories which form and inform their lives as football supporters.

These stories become meaningful in their daily lives and they might contest or confirm what they believe. And in this case, as the stories are repeated, they might come to signify the relationship between the fans. They become part of people’s consciousness and every negative incident will be recognised as a characteristic of the other as *the* other. In this way it confirms what one already knew, as well as becoming symbolic expressions that help maintain the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

“The city’s all ours...”

It is late in the evening. It is cold and the rain is pouring down. It is time for a couple of pints before closing-time. We are heading for *the Cabbage*.¹⁴

An older fellow is outside smoking. He looks like a regular. We try to get past him when he stops us.

“You still have time for a pint or two,” he says.

“Alright thanks, mate,” I reply and make my way past him.

Before I can get past him though, he stops me.

“Where are you from, lad?”

“Norway.” I answer him quickly, anxious that the pub will close before I can get to the bar.

“So you’re a Liverpool fan, then?”

¹⁴ Another pub near Anfield.

“Yeah, actually I am from the same place as Stig Inge Bjornebye,” I say, thinking that this information might interest him.

“Who?!”

A bit surprised by his answer I try to explain that he used to play left back for Liverpool.

“Never heard of him,” he says quickly.

I try once more:

“He played for Liverpool in the nineties...”

He shakes his head. Not very interested in football, I guess.

“You don’t follow football?” I ask him.

“No, I am not interested in football. I am an Evertonian.”

He cannot hold his laughter back. “HAHAHA!!”

When he is finished, he goes on:

“You know, in Liverpool most people support Everton.”

“If you’re from Liverpool, you support Everton,” he says again, just to emphasize his point.

“Liverpool supporters come from Ireland, Norway and from the South,” he continues.

There is no point in arguing. He has already made his mind up.

“You’ve been to the match?”

He has almost finished his ‘roll-your-own’-cigarette.

“Yep,” I say, feeling guilty as charged.

“Who won?”

Is he suddenly interested now?

“Liverpool won 2-0. Shit game, though.”

“If you want to get the real football atmosphere you should go to Goodison Park.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Everton’s home ground.

He throws his cigarette on the ground, steps on it and tells me he has had enough beer for now and bids me a good night. I return his greeting and head into the pub.

There is a general perception amongst the Everton fans that most of the Liverpool fans come from outside the city. The Evertonians believe this so strongly that they have actually spelled out ‘The People’s Club’ in large letters on the outside of Goodison Park. This claim that Everton are *the* club in Liverpool is, of course, frowned upon by the ‘red’ half of town. A friend of mine cannot hide how much he dislikes Evertonians:

What really pisses me off is that they call themselves ‘the People’s club’. It was David Moyes¹⁶ who came up with this ludicrous idea. This phrase was originally coined by Bill Shankly when he was talking about Liverpool FC. He had a very close relationship with the Liverpool supporters and used every chance he had to talk about his relationship with the fans in the media. That Everton call themselves ‘the People’s club’ is absolute bollocks.

The history

The rivalry between Liverpool and Everton goes back more than a hundred years. Liverpool Football Club was, in fact, born after a conflict between the land-owner and Everton. In 1878, the members of St Domingo Methodist Chapel, close to the village of Everton, formed a football team. At first they played their matches in Stanley Park – the very park that separates the two clubs today. But the team was so successful they soon changed their name to Everton Football Club. The team had become too big for the chapel community (Menuge 2008: 62).

In 1884, Chairman John Houlding leased a field on Anfield Road. This was to be Everton’s home ground for a few years. He also owned *the Sandon Hotel* next to the football field. The hotel was used as a changing room for the players, the club’s offices were situated there, and the supporters came there for a pint before the match. Those who came to watch football on a Saturday afternoon liked their beer, and Houlding, who was also the Chairman of Liverpool Brewers’ association, made sure that only his beer was sold to supporters, players and directors (Menuge 2008: 63-65).

In 1891, Houlding bought the land around the Anfield ground and proposed that the club should rent the land from him. This was not appreciated by the majority of directors. They felt the asking price was too high. The conflict was so bitter that most of the members, directors and players decided to end the partnership with Houlding and build their own ground on the other side of Stanley Park (Menuge 2008: 65-66).

¹⁶ Everton’s current manager.

So Everton left Anfield after a conflict about rent. Liverpool Association Football Club was formed because the chairman suddenly found himself stuck with a football ground, and no team. But even though most players had moved across the park, Houlding managed to find players before the new season started in September 1892. Liverpool won the Lancashire League in their first year, and was elected into the second division for the next season. Success was also achieved in the second division as the new-born club won promotion to the top flight in their first attempt. Suddenly the village of Everton, just outside the city of Liverpool back then, had two football clubs competing at the highest national level (Menuge 2008: 66).

The match

Success on the pitch gives the fans ‘bragging rights’. They can walk around with their head held high because it simply makes them feel better and superior to their rivals. In January and the beginning of February 2009, the two teams from Merseyside played each other three times in the space of less than twenty days. The first two matches ended in draws, one in the League, the other in the FA Cup. This was the night of the FA Cup replay:

I am in a pub close to Anfield. Almost none of the supporters are wearing any clothes that would signify their affiliation with Liverpool FC. You can see the odd fellow with a Liverpool scarf or shirt, but most have neutral colours. Given the bitter relationship between the clubs one is better off wearing camouflage.

We finish our beers, hide the rest of the unfinished bottles in our jackets, leave the pub and join the march down to Goodison Park. Outside the pub, two fellows are holding a banner showing a jubilant red Kopite¹⁷ with his rattle, victoriously rejoicing over a crying Toffee-lady.¹⁸ We are marching on to Goodison Park.

People are walking while singing songs about their hate for their neighbours:

“WE HATE EVERTON AND WE HATE EVERTON!! – WE ARE THE EVERTON HATERS!!”

¹⁷ A term for a Liverpool supporter, who back in the days stood on the Kop, and nowadays sits in the same stand, behind one of the goals at Anfield.

¹⁸ Years ago, there were two toffee-shops close to Goodison Park. Inside the ground on match-days, one could also buy toffee from the ‘toffee-ladies’ before the match and during half-time. Therefore Everton is nicknamed ‘The Toffees’.

People take large swigs, empty their bottles and throw them – trying not to hit anyone – into the front-gardens of the adjacent houses. We are walking and drinking, revelling in the possibility that the arch rivals might move to the suburb of Kirkby:

“THE CITY’S ALL OURS!! – FUCK OFF TO KIRKBY!! – THE CITY’S ALL OURS!!”¹⁹

But not all songs degrade the Toffees. We are also warning the Evertonians that we are on our way to Goodison Park:

“WE’LL BE COMING! - WE’LL BE COMING! - WE’LL BE COMING DOWN THE ROAD!! WHEN YOU HEAR THE SONGS OF THE BILL SHANKLY BOYS... WE’LL BE COMING DOWN THE ROAD!!”

As we get closer more people join in. The singing gets louder:

“LIV-ER-POOL!! LIV-ER-POOL!! LIV-ER-POOL!!”

Coming around the corner of Stanley Park we pass some pubs on the other side of the street. The Everton fans are out drinking.

“BLUE WHITE SHITE!! – HELLO! HELLO!”

When they hear us they start singing too. Some of the marching Liverpool fans stop to sing back at them, keen to remind them that Liverpool has won the European Cup five times:

“WE WON IT FIVE TIMES!! – WE WON IT FIVE TI-IMES!! – IN ISTANBUL!!! – WE WON IT FIVE TIMES!!”

Along the last five hundred yards or so, before we reach the stadium, a row of police officers are lined up in the street to separate the rivalling fans. There must be hundreds. At the same time, mounted police are monitoring everything. We walk on.

Inside the ground the atmosphere is definitely hostile too. A middle-aged man next to me holds his hand up showing five fingers. Many Liverpool fans are doing the same, sticking it to their neighbours who have never won the European Cup.

The tannoy is playing out an Everton-song:

¹⁹ Everton FC is planning a stadium-move to Kirkby, and after the first FA Cup-meeting a fan told me, with a grin on his face, that Kirkby is actually “officially outside the City of Liverpool.”

“IF YOU KNOW YOUR HISTORY!! – IT’S ENOUGH TO MAKE YOUR HEART GO OOH-OOH-OOH-OOH!”

For the Liverpool fans, history is measured by success.

Before the game, and continually during the game, the Liverpool supporters are throwing rolled-up pairs of socks onto the pitch while singing “YOU’LL BE RUNNING AROUND KIRKBY ROBBING SOCKS!!” and shouting “SOCK-ROBBERS!!”

The following day, I read in *the Telegraph* that the reason for the sock-throwing was that the poor area of Kirkby struggles with crime. Apparently burglars break into houses wearing socks on their hands so they will not leave any fingerprints.²⁰ On the bus to Portsmouth the following Saturday, I hear a different version. This time it is emphasized that people in Kirkby are often robbed of their laundry when it is hanging out to dry. Another fan tells me yet another version a couple of days later:

I was watching the FA Cup replay between Everton and Liverpool on TV and the commentators didn’t have a clue about what was going on. But the reason is that in the seventies, the Kirkby area was, and actually still is, a very poor area. And the burglars were breaking into houses in their socks.

The burglars could not afford shoes. Poverty is again emphasized. Whether the first, second or third explanation is the right one, does not really matter. Maybe they all are. The main purpose was to mock Everton, who are seriously looking into the possibility of leaving their home ground for a new stadium – miles away from the club’s origins – in order to increase their revenues, in an area obviously short of money. In these money-crazed times, when Russian oligarchs and Arab sheikhs are buying clubs to bask in the glory of the world’s most popular sport, Everton are desperate join in on the race. The Liverpool fans seem to have spotted the irony.

Let us get back to the FA Cup replay:

Everton scored the only goal of the match in the last minute of extra time. Dan Gosling fired a shot which deflected off a Liverpool defender and into the net. The home fans went completely berserk. The stadium erupted into a wild frenzy. The Liverpool fans were stunned. Many headed for the exits straight away. Three or four Everton fans ran onto the pitch and placed themselves in front of the Liverpool fans –

²⁰ Hayes, Roy. 2009. “Liverpool fans mock Everton’s ‘sock-robbers’” in *the Telegraph*: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/leagues/premierleague/everton/4524379/Liverpool-fans-mock-Evertons-sock-robbers.html> Downloaded 10.09.09. 14:50.

showing two-fingered 'FUCK OFF'-gestures – while shouting abuse at the shocked Liverpool supporters before the stewards wrestled them to the ground and forced them off. Some Liverpool fans answered this by throwing things at them – mostly socks – but even bottles flew through the air.

Banter and bitterness

Newspapers reported, and fans I spoke with confirmed, that the relationship between the two clubs' fans had become a bitter affair. Some even claimed that the Merseyside-derby had become the most hateful local rivalry in the whole of England.

I had watched these games on TV before and I had seen 'Red' and 'Blue' sit next to each other in the stands. I had heard that within families members supported either Liverpool or Everton. Having never been to a Merseyside derby before, I was quite surprised when I was told that the relationship – apparently – was so hostile. A story shared with me just after I arrived in Liverpool gave the impression that the bitterness between the two groups of fans was something of a newer invention:

I had been to the pub next door for a pint, but went back to the hostel to collect some things before I went to the match. Inside I met the cleaning lady, an elderly woman somewhere in her seventies. I had talked with her a couple of times before:

"Are you still here?" she asked me.

I told her that I was in Liverpool to study football fan culture.

"Ah!" she said "you've come to the right place, then. People here are football crazy. You need to have a good sense of humour if you're going to stay here. The Reds and Blues are always teasing each other. You know – the banter. Everybody loves to have a go at each other. I remember we were going to Maine Road in Manchester some years ago. Liverpool and Everton were playing each other in the semi final of the FA Cup. We all went to the pub together, then we got on the bus together, and we had a pint together at the pub outside the stadium as well. But when we got into the stadium we were all Red and Blue again. The supporters were of course having a go at each other, but it was only for fun. We played the Reds and they had Clive Thomas – the referee."

I could not remember if Everton and Liverpool had played a semi final in the FA-cup so I just asked to make sure:

“Was this a semi final in the FA-cup?”

“Yes,” she said.

“When was this?”

“Ah, I think it must be thirty years ago.”

“It’s a bit before my time, then” I replied. “Who won?”

She looked up at me.

“I said they had Clive Thomas, didn’t I?” she said with a cheeky smile.

Apparently the referee had given Liverpool a penalty which should never have been given.

“And now you are working for a Red?” I asked her with a smile.

The place I was staying in was run by a Liverpool supporter. On the walls there were several posters and pictures of Liverpool players.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t mean that I don’t go like this sometimes,” she said as she faked spitting on the wall.

After a Merseyside derby at Anfield in 2007, journalist Chris Bascombe in *Liverpool Echo* complained that the banter was gone and had been replaced with bitterness:

The line which separates banter from vindictiveness was crossed several years ago, but these acts of provocation – allied to the emergence of despicable chants about Heysel and the rest – should mean the next individual who talks about the friendly derby should be escorted to a retirement home for hopelessly deluded romantics.²¹

Maybe I was a deluded romantic. Still I could not get the pictures from TV out of my head. In the fanzine *The Liverpool Way* Andy Heaton refuses that the hateful relationship is a recent development:

There is a misconception outside the city about the relationship between Liverpoolians and Evertonians when it comes to football. People believe that the two sets of fans coexist peacefully side by side. This is not the case at all. Even during the Wembley League Cup Final in 1984, when both sets of fans famously sang “Merseyside, Merseyside” this was more a barb at the Conservative government and Mrs Thatcher, rather than a display of brotherhood and solidarity.²²

²¹ Bascombe, Chris. 2007. “Why you have to despair” in *Liverpool Echo* Monday 5th of February 2007, p. 8.

²² Heaton, Andy. 2009. “No grounds for debate” in *The Liverpool Way*, issue 67, p. 18-20.

When it comes to football, there is no love lost between the Reds and the Blues. Heaton goes on explaining:

[...] families are mixed and best mates often have different allegiances, [but] football is hardly ever the topic of conversation as passions and bitterness between the two sets of fans, especially those within the city, always sit just below the surface.²³

One day in a coffee-shop two best friends, one 'Red' and one 'Blue', do not want to talk to me about the relationship between the clubs because they would only start arguing, and one of them would surely end up leaving. They never discuss football, they tell me, and explain that they are still best friends because they became friends before they knew what football was.

Another fan tells me his son was attacked in the train station: "One of my sons was jumped on in Lime Street Station before the Everton game the other day. He was there to meet a friend when suddenly some Evertonian thugs jumped on him just because he was wearing his Liverpool-shirt."

He goes on explaining his hate for the Evertonians, confirming what Heaton says:

You know, when I say that I hate Everton, I really mean that they are the club I like the least. It's not like I want them to be victims of a natural disaster or anything, but I really want them to go out of business. Everton and Liverpool have always been rivals. My family are all red, thank God. I guess that some families are split between Everton and Liverpool, but I don't think they talk about football in these families, or at least, they don't go too deeply into the matter because of the potential conflicts.

When did it all go wrong?

At Heysel stadium in Belgium, before the European Cup final in 1985, thirty nine football supporters were killed after riots between Liverpool and Juventus supporters. The consequences were that English clubs were banned from European competitions. A Liverpool fan explains that the relationship between the Everton and Liverpool fans turned bitter from this moment on:

It changed after the Heysel-tragedy. Everton had a good side, they won the League in '85 and '87, and they believe they could have won the European Cup if they hadn't been banned from Europe. Personally I don't think they would have won it, though. But these issues will be debated forever, and obviously we'll never get an answer.

Since then Everton has struggled to get back to the top, but he has no compassion with the rivals: "When Everton fell in the nineties and was fighting to avoid relegation, the relationship turned even more bitter. The difference now is that an Evertonian will be glad if Liverpool get beat. I couldn't be bothered if Everton win or lose."

²³ Heaton, Andy. 2009. "No grounds for debate" in *The Liverpool Way*, issue 67, p. 18-20.

But *when* the relationship turned bitter is disputed. Another fellow said that things were getting worse even before Heysel:

Before Bob Paisley took over as manager for Liverpool, Everton had been the most successful club in the city. When Paisley became manager in 1974 he built a side that would eventually win the European Cup four times in seven years. Suddenly the tide had changed. In only a few years Liverpool became the most successful club in the city.

Whatever the cause, some friends I met in *the Sandon* told me that the relationship between Everton and Liverpool fans had been deteriorating for years. In fact, one of them had witnessed some bust-ups after the first derby-match. He had been sitting in the Anfield Road End, next to the Everton supporters. When he left the stadium, he was caught off guard when the Everton fans poured out into the street: "Some of them were up in my face, screaming. I saw Evertonians shout 'paki' to another Liverpool fan. A girl was called a 'slag', and a fight broke out just next to the Hillsborough Memorial." They were worried that the unfriendly atmosphere has become the norm these days.

Conclusion

What happens on the pitch does matter, but football is much more important than that. It is evident that the football clubs in Liverpool play an important part in how the Scousers understand who they are. As we have seen Liverpool was formed after Everton's move half a mile across Stanley Park. The clubs share both history and geographic locality. On Merseyside, the community and the people's sense of identity is inevitably linked to the clubs. One cannot understand the Scousers without at the same time looking into the importance of football in the city because the supporters of Liverpool or Everton are basically the same people. Families are sometimes split in two. For a Liverpool fan, his brother, sister, mother, father, aunt, uncle or cousin – even his best friend – might be an Evertonian. The fans know deep down that these people are the same as them.

The differences are suppressed in everyday-life for the sake of domestic peace, but on derby-day the singing, chanting, marching, gestures – and the sock-throwing – they are all part of showing that 'we' are better than 'you'. In this context, the boundaries become ever more important because the more similar people are, the more significant the small differences become in signalling membership and exclusion. These differences help people understand who they are as opposed to 'the others'. Beating one's rivals is important and football thrives on rivalries. Without it, the game is meaningless. Whether one is playing or

watching the point is to beat the opposition. So when more is at stake – the victory is ever sweeter.

Of course, it is the ‘here and now’ that matters, but people do not only understand their rivals through their encounters with them. This relationship is also informed by their own and others’ previous encounters. These ‘scattered events’ turn into ‘webs of significance’ through stories shared and, consequently, they create a meaningful totality which makes people see their rivals in a certain way. This forms the backdrop for their present ‘being-in-the-world’ and these narratives help people navigate in their daily lives as well as within the context of football. This play between past and present form the relationship between the clubs’ fans and the world stand before them as a given. So how the Evertonians and Liverpoolians look at each other becomes yet another expression of ‘the unconscious foundations of social life’. They are rivals and it cannot be any other way. The criteria for membership and exclusion, in this sense, help people understand that they are part of something bigger, that they are part of what they perceive as a ‘deep horizontal comradeship’ with others like themselves. In other words, they feel part of one specific community and not ‘the other’.

Therefore, if one’s understanding of others is informed by one’s interaction with them, it follows that this, at the same time, is informed by one’s prior understanding of them, and this in turn influence one’s dealings with them. In this regard, there is always a chance that this understanding may degrade or demonise ‘the other’, as we have seen above, and people might perceive them, not as they are, but as they believes them to be. The more negative one perceives this relationship then, the more antagonistic and bitter the relationship between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is bound to be. So sometimes life might just tell people that there *is* a difference between what things *ought* to be and what things *are*, for if people believe that a thing is real it also has real consequences for them (Hamilton 1993: 8).

5 The stadium

“They said they would have the spade in the ground in sixty days” ... “the spade in the ground in sixty days” ... “in the ground in sixty days” ... “in sixty days” ... “SIXTY DAYS!!!” Days have passed and nothing has happened. It echoes around Liverpool. Promises made by the owners in 2007. There is no activity on the building site. It is still very quiet around the fields of Stanley Park.

This is Anfield

In this chapter I will look at the significance of the ‘sporting place’ for football supporters when faced with the prospect of either sharing a stadium with their neighbours or moving to a new and bigger stadium. The ‘sporting-place’ is a venue of spontaneity and repetition, of anxiety and anticipation, of joy and despair. It is a place where people experience euphoria, happiness, frustrations, outrage, fury, anger and emptiness. It is full of sights and sounds, of smells and tastes, of dreams and songs to sing. Undoubtedly, a place like this comes with certain ways doing things:

“GET YER HATS, SCARVES AND T-SHIRTS HERE!!”

Street vendors cry out their offers.

“T-SHIRTS ONLY TEN POUNDS!!”

Buses from the city centre arrive. All kinds of people pour out. They come and go in every direction. Empty chip-papers rolls gently in the wind, drifting slowly around their feet. The greasy smell of sausages and cheeseburger’s with onions. Songs can be heard from the pubs.

People stand outside, chatting, having a pint, agreeing or disagreeing with today’s team selection. Brick-houses painted red. Kids come out of the Club Shop with their parents on their heels. Police officers walk around with their yard-long truncheons, making sure nobody strays into the streets in front of cars and buses. Police on horseback rides past.

The pubs are packed. Water drops run down dewy windows. You try to find a queue that leads to the bar. Everywhere people are standing in groups discussing whatever. Anticipation is in the air. Everything is analysed and discussed.

“Is Torres playing ? ”²⁴

“Babel’s been crap this season. ”²⁵

“Tim Cahill’s a horrible bastard. ”²⁶

Old legends are remembered and revered. It is there. The legacy of Kenny Dalglish, Bill Shankly and Bob Paisley.²⁷ It is always there. Unspoken. Taken-for-granted. The trio that made this club the most successful in England.

Matches from yesteryears are remembered. Trips to Europe. Magical nights on the Kop. Kick-off is getting nearer. More and more make their way from the pub to the turnstiles.

Inside the stadium, the crowd can be witty and ribald. This is where grown men get up in an instant telling:

John Terry that “his mum likes her big Scouse cock. ”²⁸

That Joleon Lescott is “the Elephant Man. ”²⁹

That Frank Lampard is “a fat bastard. ”³⁰

Or that Alan Shearer “should have stayed on the telly. ”³¹

This is where 45,000 people every other week join together in song.

When it is all over, at the death of the match, when the anticipation has been met and suspense released, or the pessimist has gotten his predictions right, when everything is settled, people stand up, applaud the team and go back out into the world. The sense of carnival finished.

²⁴ Liverpool’s Spanish star striker bought from Atletico Madrid for £20.2m.

²⁵ Liverpool’s young left wing bought from Ajax Amsterdam for £11.5m.

²⁶ Everton’s centre forward who equalised in the dying minutes of the FA Cup 4th round tie at Anfield in January.

²⁷ Former managers of Liverpool who brought success and glory to Anfield during the sixties, seventies and eighties.

²⁸ Rumours has it that the mother of Chelsea’s John Terry had a sexual relationship with a relative of Jamie Carragher, Liverpool’s central defender.

²⁹ Everton’s Joleon Lescott (now Manchester City) sustained serious injuries in a car-accident as a kid. Through several surgical operations the doctors managed to get him back on his feet. His face bears witness of what he had to go through.

³⁰ The Liverpool fans simply do not like Chelsea’s Frank Lampard.

³¹ Alan Shearer works as a TV-pundit for the BBC programme ‘Match of the Day’. But during the last half of the 2008/09-season he acted as caretaker-manager for Newcastle United who was struggling to avoid relegation. When they came to Anfield they were beaten by three goals to nil. The Liverpool fans wittingly reminded Shearer what he should have been doing, instead of trying himself as a football manager.

The match is being analysed in the pubs, in the endless bus-queue, in the taxi, or while walking home. If it is a good night, songs are sung. The pubs around the stadium fill up.

People get more and more drunk as the afternoon wears off.

Slowly the pub empties again.

Suddenly there is almost no one left. The barman turns on the light. The last ones find their way out and wait for a taxi to take them home.

In a week or two they will do it all over again.

Theoretical approach

Rogan Taylor claims that “[r]egular, enthusiastic festivals, which encourage, then intensify, strong emotions can also promote powerful links between a specific location (the football ground) and those who ritually assemble there” (Taylor 1992: 9). However, he goes on to argue that this “[is] not essentially about ‘place’ – it is about the prospect of victory and the heightened sensations of those who watch which can get channelled into feelings of identity and place” (Taylor 1992: 9).

The stadium-debate creates strong feelings amongst the Liverpool fans these days. The first part of this chapter will be about the ever-recurring proposal of a ground-share between Everton and Liverpool. Taylor claims that it is not essentially about ‘place’ but the prospect of victory. Still, I will argue, in some cases, place does matter more than the prospect of success.

The second part will deal with the planned move from Anfield across the street to Stanley Park.³² Since the sober beginnings in the Lancashire League, John Houlding’s new club went on to win their first League Championship in 1901. Anfield was to become venue for some exceptional achievements in the next hundred years or so.

Perhaps in no other circumstance is the significance of ‘place’ so visible as in the context of football. Every weekend people flock to the stadium to ‘enjoy’ two hours of emotional roller-coasters. Keith Basso says that:

[R]elationships to places are lived most often in the company of other people, and it is on these communal occasions – when places are sensed *together* – that native views of the physical world

³² A huge park in the Anfield area which separates the clubs’ stadiums, Anfield and Goodison Park.

become accessible to strangers. [...] [P]laces and their meanings are continually woven into the fabric of social life (Basso 1996: 109-110).

Basso goes on claiming that anyone trying to ‘change place’ is bound to run into trouble: “[S]ense of place is accepted as a simple fact of life, as a regular aspect of how things are; and if one were tempted to change it, which no one ever is, the effort would certainly fail” (Basso 1996: 144).

But in the last couple of decades, ‘place-changing’ has been happening on a large scale in British football. It would seem that the stadium no longer is as important for the fans as the prospect of victory and glory, and that the emotional bond the fans have with the club, is no longer so strongly attached to the stadium.

A ‘change of place’ is, as already mentioned, very much on the agenda in Liverpool too. Whether a move will go ahead or not is decided upon, but has not been put into effect yet. In fact, at time being, the new stadium is just a fenced-in patch of dirt. What do the fans think about leaving the ground which has been their home for more than a century?

Fans, clubs and stadiums

Following a football club is something you are brought up with in Liverpool. The formative years are crucial:

The plain fact is [that] all of us were fans from before we can remember [...] In Liverpool, as in other towns and cities, the Clubs have always been an intrinsic part of our lives. [...] In most instances, the principal driving forces were undoubtedly hereditary instincts and family influences, with son (and often daughter) following in the footsteps of the most persuasive or most ardent parent [...] To the undoubted relief of my dear parents [...] I followed the orthodox hereditary route, developing, like them, a distinctly red hue (Edge 2007: 23, 25, 29).

Parents, brothers, sisters and other relatives, friends, teachers and football coaches, they all play their part. Everyone wants the kids to follow in their footsteps. Michael says:

My cousin was only three years old when he was at Anfield for the first time. You can ask him any questions about the club and he will know it. It’s the way he was brought up. I was six the first time I went there. I think it’s the same with me. I think I know pretty much about the club too.

People’s relationship with club and stadium is certainly established at an early age. No wonder football fans get an emotional attachment to these places. And most English football clubs have remained loyal to the locality from which they sprung:

While most European countries were only just starting to build their first substantial stadiums in the 1920s, by then the majority of English football clubs were already firmly established in the grounds they occupy today. With the exception only of Norwich City (whose present ground opened in 1935) not one of England’s major clubs has moved to a new ground since 1924 (Inglis 1990: 98).

Since Inglis wrote this, a considerable number of clubs have moved away: Bolton has moved from Burnden Park to Reebok Stadium, Middlesbrough from Ayresome Park to Riverside Stadium, Manchester City from Maine Road to City of Manchester Stadium, Sunderland from Roker Park to the Stadium of Light and Arsenal from Highbury to the Emirates, to name a few.

It might seem that topophilic sentiment has been superseded by commercial considerations. New stadiums have been built, but it is nevertheless evident that there is a certain territorial imperative: “All existing relocations have been over relatively short distances – often under two kilometers from the club’s previous site.” (Bale 2000: 96). Moving far away appears to be anathema, and this certainly seems to reflect an emotional attachment to place and a sense of local pride.

Ground-share?

Football clubs in England have rarely adopted the economic logic of ground-sharing (Bale 2000: 96). From a purely economic point of view, the most sensible thing to do for Liverpool would be to share a stadium with local rivals Everton. As no building has commenced, different authority figures have time and again suggested that the clubs from Merseyside should consider this. The argument is that a larger stadium will increase their revenues, which subsequently will attract the best players and therefore give them a better opportunity in competing with other top clubs in England and Europe.

The leader of the City Council, Warren Bradley, is described as a “running joke”³³ by Tony Barrett in *Liverpool Echo*. Bradley has every now and then suggested that Liverpool’s American owners should reconsider and go for a joint stadium with Everton. This has been rejected by Liverpool more than once, but it has not stopped the councillor. Barrett protests against such a ridiculous proposal as he claims that Bradley only thinks of himself: “And as long as it keeps you happy, then why worry what the two clubs, who have consistently

³³ Barrett, Tony. 2009. “Warren Bradley’s grounds for appeal on Liverpool FC stadium share plan” in *Liverpool Echo*: <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/liverpool-fc/liverpool-fc-news/2009/05/23/tony-barrett-warren-bradley-s-grounds-for-appeal-on-liverpool-fc-stadium-share-plan-100252-23691642/> Downloaded 06.10.2009. 15:13.

insisted that a shared stadium is not on either of their agendas, and [what] their tens of thousands of fans think?”³⁴

The latest push from Mr. Bradley came in May 2009. He said the city of Liverpool could be left out of England’s World Cup bid in 2018 unless the two clubs build a joint stadium.³⁵ But it looks like he is fighting a one-man’s cause. A Liverpool fan tells me this when we discuss the ground share issue:

As my Dad said, it would be like working hard and saving your money all your life to move into your dream house, then having the Council tell you that you could move in but the smack-head from down the street, who couldn’t afford his own house, had to move in as well.

But the ground-share issue is not new. Peter Robinson, the former Liverpool Chief Executive, reveals that he already proposed a ground-share back in 1966. In September 2003, he told *Liverpool Daily Post* that: “I have always favoured the idea that Everton and Liverpool should share one ground. My thought in ’66 was that we should develop a new stadium for both clubs to use at Aintree.”³⁶ Even though this could be the most reasonable thing to do from an economic or logistic point of view, Mr. Robinson failed to convince the fans and other board members. In the 1980s he tried again...

Brian has been a regular at Anfield for twenty-two years. He remembers how Peter Robinson worked to get the clubs to understand the advantages of sharing a stadium. For Brian, this is not an option. It is not that now. And it was not back then. He is opposed to any move away from the Anfield area. He remembers how his brother, also a Liverpool fan, reacted when Robinson once again proposed a shared stadium in Aintree:

I think it was in 1984. My brother had just come back from the semi-final in the European Cup against Dinamo Bucharest. He used to travel all over the continent to watch Liverpool when they played in Europe. At that time the Liverpool Chief Secretary Peter Robinson suggested that Liverpool and Everton should build a bigger, shared stadium in Aintree, you know, outside the city where the horse-racing is. I told my brother about this when he came back from Romania. He was absolutely opposed to such a suggestion. My brother said that if they move to Aintree he would stop going to matches. I was a bit surprised by his reaction, since he used to travel all over Europe to watch Liverpool. Well, he was adamant that he wouldn’t go to Aintree for the home games.

³⁴ Barrett, Tony. 2009. “Warren Bradley’s grounds for appeal on Liverpool FC stadium share plan” in *Liverpool Echo*: <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/liverpool-fc/liverpool-fc-news/2009/05/23/tony-barrett-warren-bradley-s-grounds-for-appeal-on-liverpool-fc-stadium-share-plan-100252-23691642/> Downloaded 06.10.2009. 15:13.

³⁵ Jackson, Jamie. 2009. “Liverpool and Everton ‘must’ share new ground, council says” in *the Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/2009/jun/07/liverpool-everton-stadium-share> Downloaded 06.10.2009 15:32.

³⁶ Hilton, Nick. 2003. “Why I believe in joint approach – Robinson” in *Daily Post*: http://icliverpool.icnetwork.co.uk/0400evertonfc/0150kingsdock/tm_headline=why-i-believe-in-joint-approach-robinson&method=full&objectid=13394498&siteid=50061-name_page.html Downloaded 06.10.2009 15:44.

A move away from the Anfield area is unthinkable. Further, sharing with the enemy is a ridiculous idea. So a shared stadium seems only to be part of certain authority figures' dreams.

Harry hopes this issue must be laid dead once and for all. "It's not going to happen," he says. "There's no chance that Liverpool could share a stadium with Everton," he says before he explains why it is going to be difficult: "No Everton-supporters would sit in the Kop. The stand would be completely empty on *their* games, and the same would go for Liverpool's home matches. No Liverpool supporter would sit in Gwladys Street."³⁷

A young lady from a family of Evertonians confirmed this when I asked her if she was going to Anfield for the first Merseyside-derby in January: "I don't follow football, but my family does. They are all season ticket-holders at Goodison. But they are definitely not going tonight. My family never go to Anfield. They wouldn't be caught dead there." Apparently, for them, staying away from Anfield is regarded more important than supporting the team. With so strong feelings projected towards the 'enemy', maybe Harry is not so far off when he claims that no Evertonian would ever sit in the Kop – and vice versa.

It looks like place *does* matter more than success when it comes to the proposed ground-share. The Liverpool fans must have been relieved when the American owners emphasized that it was out of the question. *Liverpool Echo* reported from the press conference of the American take-over:

Mr Gillett [...] denied long-running speculation that he was keen to resurrect the idea of sharing the new ground with Everton FC. He said: "Let me look at all of you in the eye. I do not know where stories get started. If anyone from the management of Everton has ever seen or talked to George Gillett before, please let me know because it was my identical evil twin. The first time I met Rick Parry, I asked the question about ground-sharing. Rick looked at me and said, 'George, let me make something very clear. If that question is ever asked again of me in any way seriously, you have my resignation'."³⁸

So the ground-share proposal is rejected by both club and fans. Instead, the club is planning a new stadium in Stanley Park. Everton on the other hand, is planning to move to Kirkby.³⁹

This amuses the 'Red' part of town:

We'll be laughing if they move to Kirkby, which is actually outside Liverpool. We're having a laugh. The proposed move to Kirkby is going to be mainly financed by Tesco.⁴⁰ The Chief Executive of Tesco is an Evertonian, and as far as the fans are concerned, it won't be for their benefit. Maybe some of the

³⁷ The end behind one of the goals at Goodison Park with the most vocal fans.

³⁸ Coligan, Nick. 2007. "Winning and tradition are the top priorities" in *Liverpool Echo* Wednesday 7th February 2007, p. 2.

³⁹ During my fieldwork Everton was looking into the possibility of moving to the suburb of Kirkby north of the city. The plans have been put on hold, though, as the local council of Kirkby rejected them.

⁴⁰ A supermarket-chain in Britain.

directors will make some money on the move, but the revenues has to be split between the club and Tesco, so there's not much for Everton to get out of it as a club.

It is clear that the fans are not indifferent to the 'sporting place' in their pursuit of success and glory. Still the Liverpool fans demand a 'change of place'. In the next section we will learn that this is one of the many grievances the fans have towards the American owners.

“The heart of football”

When we come back from Portsmouth it is late in the night. The longest trip of the season is over. I get a taxi in Oakfield Road to take me home. The taxi-driver is a Red. We talk football. I do not remember much from this conversation, though, but one thing remains:

He looks at me in the rear-view mirror. We have been discussing the chance of winning the League again after all these years. But he does not really get wound up before I ask him about the American ownership.

“They said they would have the spade in the ground in sixty days, didn't they? They said that they would put money into the club, build a new stadium and that we would get any player we wanted... Well, you can see for yourself what has happened.” He frowns.

It kind of sums up what the Liverpoolians think of the ownership situation, and of the stadium-issue. He is clearly annoyed with how things have worked out since the Americans took over.

“We really need a new stadium. Anfield is too small,” he goes on.

“For every home game Arsenal makes £2m more than Liverpool from ticket-revenues. Manchester United makes even more. A new stadium will provide the money needed to attract the best players...” he says before he lets me off.

Despite the demand for a new stadium, the fans are not indifferent to where it should be. It seems that success matters, but it does not supersede all considerations. To keep up with other clubs with wealthier owners or bigger stadiums, it is believed that the right thing to do now is to build a new stadium to increase ticket-revenues. But the fans have mixed feelings about this. They seem to demand a change of place. At the same time this means leaving Anfield is inevitable, since no adequate extension of the current stadium is rendered possible. They

lament the fact that Anfield no longer serves the purpose. One fan tells me he would have wanted the club to stay: “I would have preferred they stayed at Anfield,” he says. “The best would be if they could extend the stadium they have today.” Nevertheless, he realises that times have changed. “It doesn’t seem like that’s possible. So to be able to compete we need a new stadium.”

Matt, Alan and Darren have come to terms with how money has taken control over the English game too. Success seems to be more important when I ask them what they feel about the potential stadium-move: “Wouldn’t it be sad to move away from Anfield?”

“Yeah, of course, but there’s really no other option,” Darren says. “It’s not possible to extend the capacity of Anfield because of the housing around the stadium...” He is interrupted by his friend Matt. “You could possibly add an extra tier on the Anfield Road End,⁴¹ and rebuild and increase the capacity of the Main Stand,” Matt explains, “but it wouldn’t take more than 55.000 at most.”

For some matches it is almost impossible for fans to get hold of a ticket before it gets sold out. Both local fans and supporters from abroad deserve a better chance according to Alan: “You know there are so many people that want to go to matches. That’s another reason why they should build a new stadium.”

One could get the impression that the fans have been corrupted by their own desire for glory. But the fans are not thoughtless dupes who follow blindly any suggestion authority figures might come up with. Brian is clear on the stadium-issue. He is against any move away from the Anfield area: “Some people say: what difference does it make to move two miles away, or ten miles for that matter. But then where does it end?” he asks. “Football clubs are all about locality,” he continues. “If not, you end up like an American franchise.” He has nevertheless realised that the current stadium is out of date:

I think it’s time for a move to a bigger stadium. But it’s important that the design of the new stadium is similar to Anfield. It has to be box-like and not a round design. Even more important is the design of the Kop. I think that the Kop must be a massive stand behind the goal, because the Kop is such an important feature of the ‘Anfield-experience’, if you know what I mean.

The original locations of the football clubs on Merseyside is emphasized by Michael too:

The area around Anfield is ‘the heart of football’, you know, with Anfield and Goodison... To be honest, no other city in England has two big clubs like we have here. I have no trouble admitting that Everton is a big club. If you look at their history, at their roll of honour, it is quite impressive. That’s why, with two such successful clubs, this area really is ‘the heart of football’.

⁴¹ The stand behind one of the goals, opposite of the Kop.

Consequently, Michael could only embrace the idea of moving to a new stadium after the location was agreed upon. He is not very keen on a move away from the Anfield area: “When the location was sorted out, and the planned move to Stanley Park was decided upon, I could finally agree with the move.”

Conclusion

What makes up a place is, surely, decided by the events and activities that are expected to happen there. It is perceived through previous happenings which style anticipations about present and future events. But as we have seen, it is not only the team, the community of fans and their activities which form their identity. The stadium is important too. The history is contained in this place and it is evoked through people’s experience, memories and stories. The place becomes part of who they are.

A move away, at least far away, or a move together with another club, is a ridiculous suggestion within the context of English football. What makes up a ‘sporting place’ is not only the purpose-built stadium which would cater for whichever sports activities one could play there. People’s experience of a place is determined by their physical presence and practice there, and how people perceive a place is determined by their ‘gaze’, which in turn both influences and is influenced by their perception of it. So the ‘sporting-place’ is maintained or changed through people’s presence there and through their activities and the continuous re-enactments of these. In this way, previous and present activities both shape their experience of a place as well as their feelings connected to it. A place is therefore inextricably associated with different ‘ways of doing things’.

Obviously, the fans have different ways of being football fans. First of all, it is in the instance of a goal, a victory or winning a title, that the most obvious examples of communion is displayed and expressed. In this regard, the stadium plays the role of bringing people together. Every fan might have his own experience of a place, but these idiosyncratic experiences do ‘resonate’ on some level. In this ‘taskscape’ people interact through common activities and share experiences through conversations and stories.

This ‘doing-things-together’ and ‘being-with-one-another’ charge the ‘sporting place’ with meaning. When people walk around, they know that the people there are the same as them. Even though they do not know them all, there is a sense of ‘deep horizontal comradeship’ between them and a feeling of communion is evoked. Through different

practices and activities, their sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves is reenacted, confirmed or slightly changed when there is a match on. These feelings are only enhanced when fans from other teams appear.

Consequently, it is through the fans engagement with it, that each stadium draws its unique significance. So when the issue of sharing with Everton is brought up, it is not surprising that this is a ‘no-go’ area for the Liverpool fans. The prospect of victory and success does not supersede their sense of identity and belonging. The stadium is part of who they are. There is no chance that Liverpool can share a stadium with their enemy because the fans attach their identity to the stadium, and there is no love lost between the Liverpool and Everton fans. So football fans are not indifferent to the stadium-issue because the stadium does not exist ‘in itself, for itself’.

Along with the fans, the stadium serves as the longest lasting feature of the club. It gives the club and the fans a sense of continuity and belonging. Moving the location a hundred yards or so, is accepted by the Liverpool fans, as the hunger for success seems to be stronger than the feelings attached to Anfield. In this situation, the fans can attend to their pre-match rituals as they have always done. But the move comes with certain demands as well. It has to ‘look like’ the old stadium. Since the humble beginnings of 1884, the stadium has been moderated repeatedly to match new demands of supporters and authorities.⁴² Very little of the original stadium is still there. Because of the ‘replica-demand’ for the new stadium, it might be that it is not viewed as a move at all, but rather as a renewal or extension of the old one. So it might be more fitting to say, at least in this case, that the emotional bond the fans have with the club is attached to *the area* in which the stadium is located rather than to the stadium itself.

The American owners were confident they would start building within two months after the take-over. Nothing has happened. The owners’ failure to start building is one of the major reasons why the fans are unhappy. But regardless of the fans’ views on the stadium-issue, as it turns out, the stadium move is still a thing of the future. Financing is needed before anything can go forward. And as far as the fans are concerned, there is little they can do as long as the owners do not have the money, and they do not want to sell up.

⁴² The stadium was built in 1884.

6 The owners

Some owners *do* sell up and leave. New owners take control. Directors are installed or removed. Players are bought and sold. Managers are hired, then sacked, or if they can hold on for some time, they quit or retire. Sometimes even stadiums are replaced by new ones. But the fans remain. In the end, the fans believe they are the most important feature of a football club.

In the same breath, some fans regard their relationship with the football club as their longest lasting emotional relationship. Their parents die. They are pretty much grown up when they meet their wives. Then they get kids. The children grow up and move out. They might lose their jobs. Their wives might leave them. But the club they supported as a child is there – always.

Despite this, it seems fans are given little attention by the football authorities and clubs when it comes to how the game should be governed and how the clubs should be organised. Authorities and leaders disregard their opinions as long as they behave and leave their money at the turnstiles.

Theoretical approach

Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti use the term ‘semantic centred identities’ to describe how people define themselves. This can be done individually or within a specific group. However, they claim that, when it comes to understanding football rivalries, people understand who they are in a certain opposition to a fixed other. They define themselves by what they *are not* rather than by what they *are*. This is what they call ‘syntactic centred identities’. This means that the fans’ identity becomes most relevant when faced by ‘the other’:

The underlying logic of football as a cultural form tends to privilege the syntactic over the semantic through the creation of opposition at all levels. Players, teams, supporters, managerial staff, directors and team officials all have social identities that are rooted in rivalry with their “opposing numbers” (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001: 267).

I emphasized earlier how the rivalry between Liverpool and Everton is sustained and evolves through stories told and shared, and how these form and inform the Scousers’ lives. If people’s self-understanding is formed through their interactions with the ‘others’, then it follows that their prior interactions with ‘them’ also play a significant part in the present. So

this relationship is often informed, not only through direct contact, but also through stories of earlier interactions.

It can be argued that the relationship between the club and the fans is first of all a mediated relationship. The leaders tend to communicate with their fans primarily through the media. These days the ownership situation engages the Liverpool supporters like nothing else. It creates strong feelings among the locals because they feel the Americans have turned gold into dust. Where Armstrong and Giulianotti talk of the ‘opposing number’ *between* clubs at all levels, I will argue that this way of understanding who ‘we’ are applies to conflicts *within* clubs as well, especially regarding the current relationship between the fans and owners of Liverpool FC. Why are the fans so dissatisfied with the ownership situation? And how do they respond to this situation?

The demonstration

On Sunday 1st of February 2009, the supporters’ organization Spirit of Shankly organized a mass-meeting at a restaurant in the city centre:

Around four hundred people had turned up. Some other issues were discussed before the meeting went on with an update on the ownership situation – the reason why most people were there. Later that day Liverpool was playing Chelsea at Anfield. The two American owners were coming to today’s match. The speaker said he really felt they should do something and those present were asked to voice their opinion about what kind of action they should take.

“SUICIDE BOMBERS!” one fellow cried out. People started laughing.

The speaker was determined that they should have some kind of protest, but he underlined that it had to be a united protest:

“This protest is not about the manager or the team. It’s about the ownership.”

There were concerns amongst some members that the protest would be misinterpreted by the media if Liverpool were to lose.

One fellow got up and spoke to the members. He was furious. His message was clear:

“WE WANT THEM OUT!! WE HATE THEM AND THEY NEED TO GO!!”

It was followed by a round applause and shouts of support.

“Hicks is here today and he thinks he can hang on,” the main speaker added.

The furious fellow got up again:

“HICKS IS HERE TODAY. HE’S GOT TO BE TOLD. IT’S ABOUT GETTING THIS MAN OUT OF THE CLUB!!”

Another round of applause and shouts of support followed.

The voting finally decided that the protest would take place in the Main Stand car-park after the final whistle.

After the match, I made my way out of the stadium to join the demonstration. As I approached the Main Stand, I could see a large, white banner with red letters spelling out:

“THANKS BUT NO YANKS!!”

I found my place among the demonstrators. They were shouting and singing.

“WHAT DO WE WANT?! YANKS OUT!! – WHEN DO WE WANT IT?! NOW!!”

It continued for a while before they started singing:

“GET OUT OF OUR CLUB!! - YOU LYING BASTARDS!! - GET OUT OF OUR CLUB!!”

The contract negotiations between the owners and manager Rafael Benítez had been widely reported in the media to be at a standstill. There were rumours that Benítez was so dissatisfied with the contract offered, that he was threatening to hand in his resignation. The fans were not happy with how the conflict was being carried out through the media, and they were all on the side of the manager:

“THEY DON’T CARE ABOUT RAFA!! - THEY DON’T CARE ABOUT THE FANS!! - LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB IS IN THE WRONG HANDS!!”

The fans felt promises made by the Americans had been broken. Because of this everything the Americans said was referred to as bollocks:

“GILLETT AND HICKS!! – ARE FULL OF SHIT!! – FULL OF SHIT!! – SHIT!! – AND BULLSHIT!!”

The whole demonstration was carried out in good spirit and, although the reason behind the demonstration was a serious one, the Liverpool wit is always ready to find

its way to the surface. Even though the fans were at one point singing “WE’RE NOT GOING HOME – WE’RE NOT GOING HOME!” and “TOM HICKS HAS GOT A BIG FAT HEAD”, the demonstration ended shortly after singing “YOU’LL NEVER WALK ALONE”⁴³, having lasted about forty minutes.

Around three hundred people were there, making their point, telling the owners to get out of the club.

After the demonstration I went to the Albert to meet some friends. A couple of hours and a few beers later, I figured it was best to head home.

While waiting for a taxi outside the pub I got to talking with an old man who was outside for a cigarette.

“It’s all about money these days,” he told me. He did not go to matches anymore.

“I just listen to the match on the radio,” he said. “It’s better on the radio than watching it on TV because then I can imagine what’s happening on the pitch.”

He used to go to every match from the sixties till the eighties. That was football for him. He had experienced all the successful Liverpool teams. Now money had made him lose his passion for the sport.

Most supporters complain about the Americans’ broken promises and lack of money. This one was complaining there was too much of it.

The history

More than a hundred years ago, football clubs popped up all over the northern regions of Britain. The land surrounding Liverpool, the region of Lancashire, was the ‘heart of football’. When the working-men earned their half-day on Saturday, they usually went straight from work to the pub before they made their way to the stadium. Local merchants and industrialists had taken an interest in the game too, and together this meant that money kept flowing into the clubs:

Ironically, little seems to have gone into the pockets of the men who controlled and owned the clubs; the businessmen on the boards of what were limited companies. There were no directors’ fees and dividends were limited to five per cent. Big clubs made profits regularly [...] [b]ut that money was, in general, sunk back into the game. There were, of course, examples of managing directors and club

⁴³ Liverpool FC’s club song.

owners who seemed to do very well from football. But in almost all cases they were already wealthy men (Walvin 1994: 87-88).

There were several reasons why these local men of wealth would involve themselves in the game. They were the local elite, often knit together through economic, social and political bonds. They were proud of their city or home town and wanted to advance its name and interest. For politicians, the 'masses' became of interest when the Reform Act of 1884 meant that every man was given a right to vote. What better way for a politician to persuade the masses than showing an interest in the 'people's game'. For local businessmen, one way of enhancing your reputation and public status, was to stand as guarantors of bank loans. Buying shares in the club also attracted local merchants, manufacturers and entrepreneurs because it established them as patrons and benefactors of the club and, as a direct consequence, of the people (Walvin 1994: 88).

These were men who first of all wanted to enhance their social status because "football was a poor investment in financial terms for most directors of clubs" (Holt 1992: 166). The profit was regulated by the Football Association. Only five per cent of the dividend could be taken out. So back then, the owners of football clubs had an interest in the game. They were local and they were proud of their home town or city. No one in Liverpool will agree if you claim that this is also the case with the current owners.

The 'Liverpool Way'

The idea of an 'us' and 'them' does not only apply between clubs. It is also employed as the Liverpool supporters discard their owners by telling them that how they conduct themselves is not the 'Liverpool Way'. After initially embracing the American buy-out, the fans have now realised that things are not as they hoped they would be. By focusing on solidaritarian and democratic values, they try to distance themselves from the unpopular owners. Brian tells me this, when I meet him for a coffee:

Bill Shankly was the 'founder' of Liverpool Football Club as we know it. When he took over the club, Liverpool was struggling in the second division. He built this club. Shankly had a very socialist approach to football. He had this famous quote 'At a football club, there's a holy trinity - the players, the manager and the supporters. Directors don't come into it. They are only there to sign the cheques'.

Shankly's 'wisdom' has been rejuvenated today. The 'ancestral father' is called upon by the fans in order to dissociate themselves from the owners. He is lined up as an anti-thesis: "The socialism I believe in, is everyone working for each other, everyone having a share of the rewards. It's the way I see football, the way I see life," he once said. This kind of self-

affirmation tells the Liverpool fans what ‘we’ are as opposed to what ‘they’ are and subsequently what ‘we’ are *not* (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001: 267). The fans are of the opinion that the Americans have failed to understand the ‘Liverpool Way’. What, then, is the ‘Liverpool Way’?

Brian tells me that John Smith, the former Chairman of Liverpool FC, once said: “We don’t like change at Liverpool”. The club has always regarded itself a very traditional club that does not run hastily into every new development the game offers. Whereas other clubs have moved to new stadiums, with modern facilities, big screens, mascots, fireworks, both pre-match and half-time entertainment, easy access by car, bus or train, Liverpool have remained very sceptical to all these commercial and entertainment-driven changes which flooded the game after the introduction of the Premier League in 1992: “Liverpool supporters [were not] easily convinced [...] by new ways of presenting the sport – music, video screens, or electronic scoreboards [...] [and] it found no welcoming space at Anfield among fans, administrators or staff” (Williams 2001b: 33).

Time, though, finally came for the Merseyside club to look for new investors. David Moores, the previous owner, had realised that he no longer had the financial power to keep up with the Russian oligarch-owned Chelsea and the commercially successful Manchester United⁴⁴ and Arsenal. After years of searching for new owners, the first day in the ‘rejuvenation’ of Liverpool Football Club, the day the Americans took over, was marked in a traditional way. In *Liverpool Echo*, Tony Barrett described how the press conference was done the ‘Liverpool Way’. Barrett emphasized the traditional ways and the need for continuity as important factors for the future of the Anfield club:

The Main Stand is a throwback to Anfield days gone by, witnessing most of the club’s glory years at home and abroad. Surrounded by the seated Kop, Centenary Stand and renovated Anfield Road End, it provides a link with the past and a sense of history which permeates even football’s ceaseless evolution. It was as if the club was saying there may well be change at the top but Liverpool FC remains the same traditional club and retains the same family values which have served it so well over the years. There was no fanfare, fireworks or razzmatazz. This was the Liverpool Way of doing things. Everything was low key with no grand gestures [...]⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Manchester United is viewed as the commercially most successful club in England, with the highest turnover per year. But in 2005, the American Malcolm Glazer bought the club and transferred the debt onto the club. Since then, there have been worries amongst the Manchester United fans that this might lead the club into economic chaos if the owners decide to sell players in order to cover the debt. Today, the fans of the Manchester-club are, apparently, facing similar concerns as the Liverpool fans.

⁴⁵ Barrett, Tony. 2007. “The Liverpool Way of revolution” in *Liverpool Echo* Wednesday 7th of February 2007, p. 3.

But even though history and tradition play a significant part in defining the ‘Liverpool Way’, it first of all refers to a style of play. “It’s a way of playing football. It’s the pass-and-move strategy,” a fan explains. In 1959, when Bill Shankly arrived at the club, he introduced new training principles and focused on keeping play simple. Only two touches were allowed on the ball. When you received the ball, you trapped it before you passed it on to the next man. The team was in focus. Stephen Hopkins elaborates on how this playing style interacts with other aspects of the club:

[...] popular myths have developed concerning the ‘right’ way for a Liverpool team to play, and these are strongly held, transmitted to new generations of supporters and players, creating an unbroken link with the past, and consolidating a complex process of identity construction. [...] A *collective* approach, based on the understanding that the team is all, and the individual nothing without the team, helped produce a team ethos founded on self-respect, discipline, trust and dedication to the overall cause. [...] The ‘Liverpool Way’ has privileged pass-and-move, a ‘shape’ or pattern of play that was efficient and, above all, controlled (Hopkins 2001: 77, 79, 80).

This team strategy implied that Shankly sought players who selflessly would give everything for the collective:

Shankly laid the foundations at Liverpool by choosing players who showed personal responsibility of playing for the club. The Liverpool Way was to sign skilful, resilient players who could fit into the passing and movement game, players who would respond to tough training principles and serve an apprenticeship in playing the Liverpool Way, players who could take responsibility for themselves and make decisions on the pitch for the good of the team (Ward with Williams 2001: 67).

But the collective approach goes further. Beyond the pitch, the ‘Liverpool Way’ holds a set of norms for those working at the club as well. Brian tells me that he:

[...] actually proposed on a Supporters Association meeting that everyone who are employed at Liverpool Football Club, both player and staff, should sign a form which states that they follow the ‘Liverpool Way’. And if they don’t they would first get a warning and then if they break it again, they would get sacked.

The fans are not happy with how internal conflicts have been leaked to local and national newspapers since the American take-over. In January 2008, *Liverpool Echo* reported that the owners had been in contact with Germany’s ex-national team coach Jürgen Klinsmann to inquire if he would replace Rafael Benítez as Liverpool manager.⁴⁶ “It was when the owners went behind Rafa’s back and tried to get Klinsmann, the majority of fans turned against them. Since then everybody has hated them,” Michael says.

Then, in January and February 2009, newspapers repeatedly reported that a row was developing over Rafael Benítez’ new contract. The manager wanted more control over transfers and the youth academy, but the owners were not ready to give him this. Both the

⁴⁶ Barrett, Tony. 2008. “Klinsmann Talks Rock Rafa” in *Liverpool Echo* Monday 14th of January 2008, p.42 and 44.

owners and the manager were airing their views and frustrations in the media. This is not the way to handle internal conflicts according to Darren and others:

The Liverpool Way is about keeping it all inside the club. In the past, everything was being kept behind closed doors. For example, we never knew which players came to the club, before they were presented as a Liverpool player at a press conference. You never had these speculations.

“The ‘Liverpool Way’ is way of keeping things inside the club,” another Liverpool fan confirms before he adds that it is “not to publicly criticize others.” Yet another one thought the fault all lay with the owners: “I don’t like how the owners now use the media whenever they can to front their views. I believe they use the media strategically. I don’t blame Rafael Benítez for airing his frustrations in the media. He’s got his back against the wall.”

It seems that they would rather be kept in veil of darkness than getting a view of what is going on being the scenes. Rather the fans emphasize the need to stand together instead of taking conflicts into the public eye: “We don’t want to know about Rafa’s contract before it’s signed,” Michael says. “The communication channels are terrible now, and it might influence the players in a negative way.” He does not like how the club’s problems are splashed out on the front pages: “It’s just embarrassing for the club.”

“Take ya bounty and get out of our club”

Everything seemed bright for the Merseyside club in February 2007. Now that has changed. Mistaken as benefactors at first, the fans now believe the Americans are only in it for the money, neither caring for the fans nor the manager.

“It’s not that they’re foreign that’s the problem,” Darren says. “With all the money that goes into football these days, there are no local business men that could have bought the club. No one in Liverpool has this kind of money unless they suddenly find £100 billion in their back pocket that they didn’t know they had.”

“It’s because they *lied!!*” Matt says, emphasizing that the Americans fooled the fans into believing that they had the money needed to take the club forward and by presenting themselves as genuinely interested, both in football and in taking the financial responsibility for bringing the club back to the top of the English Premier League. From the fans’ point of view, no money has been spent by the Americans: “Basically they have borrowed all the money to buy the club. Even when they bought Torres, they borrowed money from the bank. They haven’t put any of their own money into the club...” Matt explains.

The ownership situation affects Harry so bad he has trouble sleeping at night: “Every night, before I go to sleep I think about shooting Tom Hicks.” He has a very serious look on his face. “Obviously I am not going to do it,” he says. “I don’t have a gun and I am terrible at shooting.” Harry laughs. “But I really hate these guys and they’re not doing anything for the club.” He is back to serious:

They just borrowed money to buy the club, and they also borrowed money to buy players. You know, Liverpool Football Club has been around for about 120 years. In all those years, the supporters have put their money into the club. Suddenly these two cowboys come around and we, who have already paid once, now have to pay again. It’s like this with all the businesses of the Americans. They borrow money and then they put all the debt on them. So they put absolutely nothing of their own money in it.

Brian, too, has so strong feelings towards the Americans that he ponders on how the fans can get through to them with their views:

What we should have done, was to go to USA and harass them to show them that they are not really wanted at the club. They only come over to watch games a couple of times a year. If they had lived in Liverpool, the fans would really have made their lives miserable. Tom Hicks once compared Liverpool with Weetabix, another business he owns. Those who eat Weetabix every morning will keep on eating Weetabix, he said. That’s how he feels about the supporters as well.

Brian is clearly insulted by such a comparison. The owners do not even try to understand the fans’ point of view. They just expect them to leave their money at the gate.

Harry is worried about the future. He cannot see how the club will get out of this mess:

The revenues that Liverpool makes through ticket sales and selling supporter gear, all goes to pay the interest on their loans. Liverpool used to spend about £20M on players every year. Now the club pays £30M in interest on their loans. So there is no money left to spend on players.

The ‘rich uncles’ from America came with promises. Time, though, has shown that these were of the empty sort. Brian does not like how the Americans have behaved after they bought the club. He’s questioning their sincerity: “They bought the club in order to build the stadium, and then take the money from it and leave. Now, when they can’t get the stadium up, they don’t really have a plan.”

The fans hope to find a way to wrest the club out of the hands of these ‘parasites’ who prey on their passion. “Who’s going to get us out of this?” Harry asks before he tries to answer his own question:

The DIC⁴⁷ are out of money and probably no one in today’s financial climate would use their money on a football club. People don’t have that kind of money to spend anymore and there’s no money to be earned from owning a football club.

Early in February 2009, Harry tells me that he fears what might happen when the summer comes: “When their [the owners] loan is due in July, we can actually have the situation where

⁴⁷ DIC (Dubai International Capital) tried to buy the club in 2007, just before the Americans came in.

Liverpool have won the League only to lose it again if they get points deducted because of their huge debt. In the worst case the club will go into administration.”

But not everyone is as pessimistic as the fans above. A Liverpool fan, writing under a pseudonym, is questioning if the notion of having a rich owner is the only way of running a football club. Although he does not give an answer, he still poses the question:

Saudi owner or Yanks? Will it matter? Is the idea of having a rich owner now something that should be the norm rather than the exception? Let's be honest, when our Yanks took over we thought we would be closing the financial gap between our main rivals. That didn't happen because our owners are useless. But by October 2009, 10 clubs out of 20 in the Premier League have foreign owners. If you don't have a foreign owner can you still compete? And when I say foreign owners what I really mean is foreign business men, people who aren't buying clubs for the love of the game, but for profit. These are people who won't care what carnage they cause as long as they can show profit.⁴⁸

Given the amount of money needed to succeed in the Premiership, foreign business men have come in galloping the business. But from the Liverpool fans' point of view, the owners have failed. They have not even tried to understand what it means to be a football fan. It is believed that they only think of profit:

It is October and I should be talking about League positions and events on the pitch. Instead I am talking cynically about being seen as a cash-cow for our American owners. I am sure that I (and many like me) have appeared on Wall Street projection charts; that I have been classified as, among other things, a percentage gain, a projected profit, a demographic, a turbulent pre-tax blip. I would wager that in Tom & George world I have never been referred to as a supporter. That word isn't in the Dragons Business Dictionary. Nor is fan or loyalty.⁴⁹

History has shown that English football have depended on men of power and influence. But these were local men with an interest in the game. Today's owners, on the other hand, are not seen as proper custodians. But the change from local owners to foreign businessmen is slowly laying ground for further change. Anthony King says that if society is to change, there has to be a change in the mindset of people, because it is “a society's ideology [that] provides a framework for the kind of mode of production which is possible. Ideas and values are implicit in social and economic transformation from the very outset” (King 2002: 21). And in this era of oligarchs and sheiks some are trying to think differently in Liverpool.

The idea of supporter-ownership has been launched. This is a common way of running a football club in for example Germany, Spain and Latin America. As members, they vote for candidates to become president for a given period. The fans can discard presidents who have not done their job right and reject candidates they do not believe will be for the good of the club. In this way the fans have the power to influence how the club is run, quite different from

⁴⁸ Pilchard, Semolina (pseud.). 2009. “Ownership and things like that” in *Red All Over the Land*, issue 145, p. 26.

⁴⁹ Pilchard, Semolina (pseud.). 2009. “Ownership and things like that” in *Red All Over the Land*, issue 145, p. 26.

the English system, where the owners can do as they please, regardless of the fans' opinions, as they are only responsible towards their creditors.

Some Liverpool fans are looking to these countries as they try to find a way to take control of their football club. The idea is that fans go together and buy shares so they can buy the club 'back'. Although imported, it is a solution that fits perfectly with the Scousers' self-image and the 'Liverpool Way'. The collective approach employed on the pitch during Shankly's era is now resurrected in the fans' strive for change so that once again, following Shankly's 'words of wisdom', everyone will work for each other and everyone will get a share of the rewards.

"I would love it if the fans could buy the club, but I think it's only about buying some shares in the club," Brian says. He does not think the local fans make it on their own:

If you buy a share for £5.000, you put your money into the club, but you don't really get any privileges. Now who's got that kind of money, and who's going to pay that, without expecting something in return. If you buy a share you get one vote, but you can only buy one share, and if you put, let's say £20.000 into the club, you still only get the one vote. And you are not guaranteed any tickets. If Liverpool fans are going to buy the club, we really need the support from the foreign supporters abroad, otherwise we can't make it.

Michael is tempted by the idea of fan ownership, too, although he is not sure whether they can succeed in their objectives: "The idea that the fans should own the club is a good one. But I don't think it will happen. £5.000 for a share is quite a lot of money."

Anyway, the financial crisis has put everything on hold. The unemployment rate in England is on the rise and it is going to take time before the fans can get the money together. At the same time, it is wholly dependent on the current owners and their willingness to sell: "Ideally I would love it if they succeed in their objectives," Brian says. "But I can't really see it happening because what the supporters want is irrelevant as long as the Americans won't sell. What can you do?"

Brian has found another way: "Personally I don't buy anything from the supporter shops, but it's a personal thing. And I never buy anything in the refreshment-shops during half-time either." He nevertheless realises how futile his efforts are: "The problem with this boycott is that most of the money they earn from owning the club comes from ticket-sales. And we can't boycott the team. Because that's what it's all about." Having been a season ticket-holder for more than twenty years, there is no chance he will give it up:

If we stop going, if I sell up my season ticket, there will thousands waiting in line ready to take it off me. If I went on one of the internet-forums tonight, and posted that I couldn't afford to hold on to my season ticket anymore, I would probably get hundreds of replies in just a few minutes.

The owners have the supporters by their throats. They are in fact controlling the thing everyone is addicted to. So they can keep extracting 'monopoly rent' from the supporters because, at time being, the fans have no other opportunity.

Therefore, the fans show their dissatisfaction by demonstrating and by actively trying to intimidate the owners to make them go away. As the relationship between the American owners and the fans has deteriorated, the owners deliberately avoid any direct confrontations with the fans. The son of Tom Hicks tried it once. It is likely he will not try again. A Saturday afternoon in February 2008, he decided to go for a pint with the locals. After the home match against Middlesbrough he made his way to *the Sandon*:

At first, the conversations were cordial with one Liverpool supporter approaching him to register his disquiet about the way Liverpool Football Club is being run. But as an increasing number of fans recognised the 6ft 4ins Texan, the atmosphere soon turned ugly and Mr Hicks and his bodyguards quickly became nervous. Mr Hicks decided to evacuate, but not before he was spat at by one fan and swilled with lager by another. He was surrounded by his bodyguards and rushed out of the establishment and into a waiting people carrier which sped away from the scene as angry fans spilled out of the pub.⁵⁰

During the demonstration described above, the owners stayed inside until the fans had left the car park. In December 2009, Tom Hicks was on his way to watch the home match against Arsenal. As he approached the stadium he was advised by the police to turn his car around because they could not guarantee for his security.⁵¹

Conclusion

The Americans were embraced at first, but the image was deceptive. The fans thought the new owners truly were sports-interested patrons, who would put money into the club so that the League title would finally make its way back to its 'proper home'. They fooled the fans into believing they were of the same sort. Instead the Americans turned out to be quite the opposite. As it turns out, the Americans were not rich, and according to the collective consensus amongst the fans, they have no money. As time has gone by, the fans have realised that the Americans bought the club in order to profit from it. As a consequence, the fans have turned against them. In this situation, the socialism preached by the 'ancestral father' Bill

⁵⁰ Barrett, Tony. 2008. "I wanted to talk to fans, says Tom Hicks's son" in *Liverpool Echo*: <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/liverpool-fc/liverpool-fc-news/2008/02/25/i-wanted-to-talk-to-fans-says-tom-hicks-s-son-100252-20520756/>. Downloaded 17.12.2009 14:44.

⁵¹ Spirit of Shankly [author unknown]. 2009. "Protest review – Hicks turned away from ground": <http://www.spiritofshankly.com/news/Protest-Review--Hicks-turned-away-from-ground.html>. Downloaded 18.12.2009 13:43.

Shankly and the 'Liverpool Way' have become means through which the fans stress their identity as completely different from the owners.

The fans express their disquiet through different activities and actions and in these 'taskscape' the fans emphasize what matters for them. An image of communion is articulated in the demonstrations and the resonance that occurs between the fans reinforces this belief. As a consequence, the 'deep horizontal comradeship' which is evoked on match-day does not include the Americans. They are, in fact, viewed as a threat to the very existence of the football club and subsequently to the fans themselves. So the fans are doing what they can to make them go away. In the meantime, while they are waiting for a solution to come around, they are actively trying to intimidate them to make them *stay* away.

Although different 'taskscape' only exist when they are performed, they are constantly recalled in memories and stories. This recollection of previous happenings and encounters help inform and guide people in how they understand, not only the past and present, but also who they are. In this conflict, the Liverpool supporters understand who they are in relation to, or rather in opposition to, the Americans. As stories are told and memories remembered, this self-understanding, continuously communicated through demonstrations and activities, is in all its essence directed towards a change in how the club is organised. Therefore the owners will never regain the trust and support of the fans because it is evident that how the fans view the owners is incompatible with how they look at themselves.

So the opposing number between clubs, or the 'syntactic centred identities', are not only useful in order to understand relationships *between* clubs, but can also illustrate how the conflict *within* a football club is carried out. And, as it turns out, not only the Evertonians help the Liverpool fans understand who they are through an image of the 'other'.

As the world's financial climate deteriorated, the plan the Americans so neatly had worked out, fell to the ground like a dead man. But regardless of this, it seems that the current owners do not want to sell up, even though they are hugely unpopular. So the fans just have to let time go by. The fear now is that the Americans do not have the economic power to make the club compete with the other top clubs.

And even worse, as time goes by, and the club is run in an unsatisfactory way, there is a real fear amongst the fans that Liverpool may end up as Leeds United, who after years of miserable economic management were forced to sell most of their players to cover their debt. This wholesale eventually led to relegation, first to the Championship, and then to League

One from where they now are struggling to get back to the top. Will Liverpool be viable if they fail to qualify for the Champions League?

Only time can tell whether Liverpool will be the next Leeds United or not. But if that happens, what really makes up a football club will become evident. If the club goes into administration, players, managers and directors will disappear and the owners will be forced to sell. But most fans will remain 'through the wind and rain'.⁵²

Today, the Americans truly have the supporters by the throats since they control the thing everyone is addicted to. The owners can keep extracting their 'monopoly rent' in order to pay off their loans and keep the creditors happy, money that could have been used on a new stadium and new players. Football is about winning and, at the end of the day, the outcome of the match depends on how the players perform. Even though new players might be long coming these days, in the next chapter we will look into what the players mean for the fans.

⁵² A line from *You'll never walk alone*.

7 The players

The trans-nationalisation of the European transfer-market after the Bosman-ruling of 1990, meant that players who were out-of-contract could join other clubs without a transfer-fee being paid to their former clubs. In addition, national player-markets were replaced by an international market. ‘Foreign-player’-restrictions were abandoned so that clubs could search for talents and players out-of-contract all over Europe (King 2003: 69-85).

Today, Liverpool FC has only two local players who play regularly. Liverpool-born Ian Callaghan played for the club for almost two decades in the sixties and seventies. He is pointing out the importance of having a local spine in the team:

You look at Liverpool teams over the past six or seven years and despite all the players who have been signed, our two best players have been Carragher and Gerrard. Having local lads in the side makes a big difference because they know what it’s all about. They are both fantastic players and understand the history and the tradition – they know what it means to the fans.⁵³

Theoretical approach

Traditionally, English professional football clubs have had deep roots in their communities. Almost all of them are named after places and share names with towns, cities or areas of cities from which they sprung. Even though clubs might move to a new stadium, they never move far. In the early days, football clubs came to fill a representational role for people living in urban areas of England. Through football, fans found a way to know themselves, and, at the same time, a tangible opportunity to differentiate themselves from other towns, cities and regions. While the football clubs came to present and represent one’s town or city, the football players were given the task of representing club and fans on the pitch.

When it comes to the recent developments in English football, we need to look at how the fans experience the rising number of foreign players, and how it affects their relations to the team. Even though the match is the core of the game and the players the main performers, the fans play their part too. In order to understand how the fans relate to the players, we need to look at how the fans and players ‘resonate’ when they ‘interact’ inside the stadium. We have used the term ‘taskscape’ to understand how culture is reenacted through the fans’ activities on match-day. This term can also be useful when we look at how fans and players interact because certain places entail certain ways of doing things. There would be no places

⁵³ Pearce, James. 2009. “Why a local spine is so vital to Reds” in *Liverpool Echo* Thursday 8th of January, p. 54.

without people and people would not have any notion of a place if they had no relation to it. People and places are inevitably linked together and how people perceive places is informed by their gaze. So by paying attention to what matters for people in different places, we can understand better what kind of places these are.

When John Houlding suddenly found himself with a football ground, and almost no footballers, he had to think fast to get a team on the feet before the new season. He did manage to get a team together, although then as now, the team lacked in local players: “[They] have got a very good and powerful team, nearly all Scotchmen, to represent the club [and this] is demonstrated by the result of their match with Rotherham Town on Thursday (7 goals to 1).”⁵⁴ In 1901, Liverpool FC won their first League Championship. The title was brought home to Merseyside after the Reds had clinched it away to West Bromwich in the last match of the season: “The celebrations went on long into the night, and it mattered little to the supporters of the club that players in the victorious team were not raised in Liverpool; it was the territory of the *crowd*, not that of the players, which mattered” (Williams 2001b: 22).

Whereas in the early days of football, when most English clubs looked to Scotland for players, what is different nowadays is that players come from all over the globe. Given these changes, how do the fans relate to the team? And if the players’ organic ties to the place does not matter, what makes a player popular with the fans?

Star players

“We don’t mind as long as their good enough,” Darren says. “Who wouldn’t want a player like Torres..?”

Fernando Torres, Liverpool’s Spanish striker, has taken the fans by storm. In his first season at the club he scored over thirty goals. Liverpool has not had a striker like this since the mid-nineties. This striker was Robbie Fowler. The supporters simply called him ‘God’. Torres almost reached ‘God’-like status himself, one week after my conversation with Darren and his friends:

It is Chelsea at home. It is still goalless. The clock is ticking away when Fabio Aurelio is played through on the left. Ninety minutes is fast approaching. Aurelio looks up, aims and crosses. Torres manages to escape his man-to-man marking. He beats

²⁶ *Liverpool Football Echo* September 3rd 1892.

Chelsea's John Terry to the near post and heads the ball hard towards goal. Chelsea keeper Petr Cech can only watch as the ball flies into the net.

The stadium erupts. The 'Torres-song' is instantly on everyone's lips.

Victory seems within reach now. In the last two league games, Liverpool has given away their lead in the last minutes. The fourth official announces that there is going to be five minutes of added time. The wait is going to be a long one. The Liverpool supporters suppress their anxiety by singing their hearts out.

Then four minutes into stoppage time, the relief finally comes. Just outside the penalty area, Yossi Benayoun pounces on a poor first touch from Chelsea's left back Ashley Cole. The Liverpool winger takes the ball off him and runs towards goal, only to be tackled again by Cole. But the left back can only push the ball across the penalty area where Torres turns up and slots home his second goal of the night. The 'Torres song' reaches new heights:

HIS ARMBAND PROVED HE WAS A RED... TORRES!! TORRES!! YOU'LL NEVER WALK ALONE IT SAID...TORRES!! TORRES!!

While playing for Atletico Madrid, a picture was taken of Fernando Torres. He was the captain of the team. As the story goes, he and some friends were passionate Liverpool supporters. Obviously, he could not show this, so his friends bought him a captain's armband with "You'll never walk alone" written on the inside. Then, while playing a match, his armband was torn and hung down so the writing was visible. This was when the picture was taken.

Liverpool fans have no trouble welcoming foreigners when they perform. It is even better when a player shows he is *one of them*.

Average foreigners versus local lads

"Players like Dossena and Lucas, though..." Darren continues.

The atmosphere was quite different at the end of the match at Wigan a couple of days earlier. Foreign players that do not perform are easily made into scapegoats. But it starts well for the Merseysiders. The away fans are ready to cheer their team on:

“WE’LL BE COMING - WE’LL BE COMING - WE’LL BE COMING DOWN THE ROAD! WHEN YOU HEAR THE NOISE – OF THE BILL SHANKLY BOYS!! WE’LL BE COMING DOWN THE ROAD!!”

The noise is immense. Benitez has opted for Lucas and Mascherano in midfield. There are moans amongst the crowd:

“It didn’t work the last time, why should it work now?”

Torres comes close with a header straight away. The ball bounces off the inside of the post and back into play again. Liverpool takes control. Wigan hardly has the ball.

After about twenty minutes, Mascherano passes the ball through to Benayoun. He gets to it before the goalkeeper and pushes the ball past him. It seems that the angle is getting too tight for a shot. But somehow Benayoun manages to pull it back towards the goal. The ball rolls slowly across the goalmouth. The Liverpool supporters wait in anticipation...

“IT’S IN!!!”

The ball rolls into the far corner. The supporters go mad. Fists are thrown into the air.

“LIV-ER-POOL!! LIV-ER-POOL!! LIV-ER-POOL!!”

The sound is deafening. The Wigan supporters have gone very quiet.

Liverpool leads by a goal to nil. You can see smiles on the faces of the Liverpool supporters. Not much else happens in the first half. The referee blows his whistle for half-time.

The Liverpool fans are joking and teasing each other while waiting for their ‘bevvy’.⁵⁵ Stories of great achievements reverberate in the toilet-queue.

The game gets under way again.

The clock is ticking away.

The Liverpool fans occasionally look at the stadium clock. It passes eighty minutes. Liverpool is still in the lead.

But suddenly, Wigan catches Liverpool on the break. It looks like the Liverpool defenders will get back and clear the danger when Lucas clumsily trips Jason

⁵⁵ Short for beverage, usually used for a pint of beer.

Koumas. There is an anxious moment before the referee blows his whistle and runs to the side of the penalty area...

“He’s pointing to the spot!!”

The Liverpool fans cannot believe it.

Rounds of “FUCK OFFS!!” are thrown at the referee and Lucas. The rest of the stadium explodes in joy. A couple of Liverpool fans try unconvincingly to cheer the Liverpool goalkeeper on:

“PE-PE REINA – PE-PE REINA! HEY! HEY!”

Wigan’s striker Mido places the ball on the penalty-spot and takes a few steps back. Everybody waits. Mido runs up to the ball and shoots...

It goes in...

Reina dives the wrong way. The home fans are ecstatic. The away supporters just stare blankly into space. Two points dropped. Some are leaving.

Another lot start to take their frustration out on the Liverpool players. Lucas and Babel are at the centre of attention. Even Kuyt gets some stick. A fellow behind me keeps shouting every time Babel gets the ball:

“YOU’RE TERRIBLE, YOU!!”

He keeps giving it to Babel:

“YOU FUCKING SHITHOUSE!!”

Another one takes his frustration out on Brazilian midfielder Lucas:

“COME ON YOU LAZY BASTARD!! YOU FUCKING TWAT!!”

Kuyt is told he is a “DUTCH BASTARD!!”

Time is running out.

The players try, but the fans have turned against them. There is no support from the stand anymore. All their attempts are feeble. The game ebbs away. It ends 1-1.

The kind of abuse thrown at Lucas and Babel at the end of the match at Wigan can be heard frequently inside football grounds around Britain. The players who do not perform are told, in

sometimes very harsh words, that they are not up to the standards expected of them. If you are not playing well, you will not get away with it.

“Like I was saying,” Darren continues, “we don’t mind that the players are foreign as long as they’re good enough, but why do they buy all these average foreign players for lots of money, when we’d better have tried one of the young players coming through?”

Another Liverpool fan tells me that it is the ‘Liverpool Way’ to let players come through the youth ranks into the first-team. But he argues that the team must be successful first: “When the situation is like today, it’s difficult to give the young players a chance. When we get success we can give the likes of Dani Pacheco and Stephen Darby a chance.”

Michael does not want to put the blame entirely on Lucas and Babel for their poor performances. According to him, there is something fundamentally wrong with how the manager organizes his players:

It’s not Lucas’ and Babel’s fault when they don’t play in the first-team. It may be four or five weeks between every time they get the chance. And those playing in the reserves, they are never in contention for a first-team place. You know the likes of Jay Spearing and Stephen Darby? Two years in a row they won the FA Youth Cup, and last year they won the Reserves League. They are used to winning things, but they don’t get any chance in the first-team. This year, the reserves are shit, and I think it’s because the reserves have realised that they won’t come into the first-team anyway.

Nevertheless, Liverpool’s most popular player managed to fight his way through the youth ranks and into the first-team. No foreign or local player has ever threatened his position. As a local lad born in Huyton, Steven Gerrard rarely, or maybe even never, gets abuse from his own fans:

“If that had been any other player than Gerrard, we would have gone like this...”

A lad turns to me after Gerrard has missed a sitter away to Manchester United:

“WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING, YOU FUCKING...”

He tries to illustrate by making gestures. With his head slightly pushed forward, and his neck-muscles tightened, he keeps shouting obscenities at the TV. We could not get tickets for this match, so we are in a pub in Hardman Street.

“But with Gerrard everything is quickly forgiven,” he says. “We just moan a bit, telling him: ‘Oh come on Stevie...’ if he misdirects a pass, loses the ball or misses a chance like that. But the reaction is somewhat more of a plea,” he explains, “not a scolding like other players may risk.”

Gerrard's popularity amongst the fans is something that goes without saying. All the important goals he has scored speak for themselves. "He's given me one of the best experiences of my life!!" Darren says. He is of course referring to the Champions' League final in Istanbul when Gerrard, as captain of the team, led the Reds to victory. It illustrates what Steven Gerrard means to them.

But sometimes the fans take to players, even though they are not local, and do not have any flair or skills. By showing enough heart and passion for the club, a player can become a favourite amongst the fans, even though he does not match the standards they generally expect from a Liverpool player. Darren almost falls over when he remembers Eric Meijer. "HAHAHA!! Do you remember Eric Meijer?" he says. Meijer was one of Gerard Houllier's⁵⁶ stranger purchases. A striker with no pace and no goal-scoring abilities. "He was shit, wasn't he?" Darren remembers. "I don't think he even scored a goal when he played for us. But he was popular with the fans." Regardless of his quality as a footballer, Eric Meijer became a cult hero. Darren explains: "Though he never scored himself he was always celebrating like a madman when Liverpool scored." Darren laughs. "He was running towards the fans, putting his fist up, clenching his teeth and screaming to the fans. I guess that's why the fans liked him."

Loyalty

Other players are loved for their loyalty. Sami Hyypiä left the club in May after a decade at the club. "I was thirteen when Sami Hyypiä came here. Since I started following Liverpool, Sami has always been there. But now it's suddenly over. It makes me very sad and it's going to be very strange next season when he's no longer around," a young lad tells me after the Liverpool fans have said their farewells to the big Finn.

A couple of weeks earlier, newspapers had told us that Hyypiä would not sign a new contract. He had been offered a one-year contract and a coaching-job afterwards, but Hyypiä still felt he had some years left on the pitch. Sami Hyypiä's last match was at home to Tottenham:

⁵⁶ Liverpool FC's manager from 1998-2004.

The Kop had prepared a mosaic that spread out all over the stand. 12,500 paper sheets held up by the fans spelled out 'SAMI' with the blue and white Finnish flag as background.

The referee blows his whistle and the match kicks off. Everybody sits down. Sami Hyypiä is on the bench.

The Liverpool fans sing:

"OH SAMI! SAMI!! – SAMI! SAMI! SAMI! SAMI HYPPIÄ!!"

After only a couple of minutes, Hyypiä is sent down towards the Kop for a warm-up. Everyone gets on their feet again. They put their hands together for another round of applause. Hyypiä responds by applauding back. After a few lengths he runs back to the bench and sits down again. We do the same. This exercise is repeated a couple of times during the match.

The match has lasted for almost eighty minutes now. Still no Sami on the pitch. The crowd is getting impatient.

"SAMI! – ON!! SAMI!! – ON-ON-ON!" is shouted from the stands, again and again.

Suddenly something is happening.

Sami is warming up with the rest of the Liverpool substitutes. Benitez gets off his seat and waves to them. Benitez waves again...

The crowd reacts. They start booing the decision when they realise that Benitez has called for David Ngog. The young striker replaces Fernando Torres.

"SAMI! ON!! – SAMI!! ON-ON-ON!" continues.

A couple of minutes later, Benitez waves again.

After eighty-four minutes, the fourth official holds up the electronic light-board, which shows that captain Steven Gerrard is coming off.

And to replace him: number four ... SAMI HYPPIÄ!!

"OH SAMI! SAMI!! – SAMI! SAMI! SAMI! SAMI HYPPIÄ!!"

The Finnish legend takes over as captain and finds his place in defence with Daniel Agger and Martin Skrtel.

The match continues.

Hyypiä is pointing and gesticulating, busy organising the troops in front of him. First he wins a challenge and the ball rolls back to Liverpool goalkeeper José Reina. Then he loses a challenge to Tottenham striker Darren Bent inside the Liverpool penalty area, but Bent's header flies a couple of yards over the bar.

In injury-time, Hyypiä connects to a Liverpool corner. He heads hard towards goal, but the ball is cleared off the line by a Tottenham defender. Shortly after, the referee blows his whistle for full-time. Liverpool win by three goals to one.

The whole stadium is back on their feet to cheer the home team. Obviously, Sami Hyypiä gets most of the attention. Sitting on the shoulders of Reina, he receives an ovation from the crowd. The Liverpool fans say an emotional farewell to a loyal legend.

Conclusion

Loyalty is appreciated, along with quality and passion. Local players are important for the local fans obviously, and maybe they sometimes get an extra chance to prove themselves, but what matters most is how good they are. Football is about winning and in order to do this they need the best players around regardless of where they happen to be born. In this sense, the 'us' and 'them' is not determined by origin, but rather by what the players do on the pitch and how they 'resonate' with the fans.

Whether a player is noted as good or popular depends on how the fans accept him regarding certain criteria. The players are the club's and the fans' representatives on the pitch and how they are regarded depends on how they respond to these criteria. In Liverpool, the individual player is nothing without the team. What makes a player popular is how he shows his dedication to the overall cause. A player's loyalty and how he fits into the team is vital because of the collective approach emphasized in the 'Liverpool Way'. Therefore, a player expressing his sense of love and belonging to the club seems to be just as important as a player's origin or nationality.

The pressures from the outside, from the media, the Thatcher-government and the general perception of the city elsewhere in England, have made the Scousers suspicious of outsiders criticising them. This has brought them closer together and given them a sense of solidarity with one another. But outsiders coming to the city – in this case foreign footballers

– are not turned away just because they are foreign. Sami Hyypiä has been accepted by the locals and has become part of this place because he has shown that he wants to be part of the collective. When the team hits a bad run, though, both a player's performance and origin might become the focus for abuse. Away to Wigan, Lucas and Babel were subject to some harsh criticism. Kuyt, too, was told he was a 'Dutch bastard'. How the fans relate to a player is determined by his performance, his ability and his will to sacrifice himself for the team. In other words, a player's popularity depends on how he epitomises the values found in the 'Liverpool Way'.

So what happens on the pitch can be read as an expression of a particular society's culture. What matters for the Liverpool fans and how they see the world, is acted out during the match and manifests itself *between* people. Thus the interaction between the fans and players contains ways of signalling whether a sense of communion is achieved or not, and a player becomes popular when he achieves 'resonance' with the fans. In this way, the 'Liverpool Way' becomes a style through which this feeling of communion is imagined.

This 'being-with-one-another' then, seems more important in determining membership than a player's 'organics ties to the place'. It is apparent that a feeling of sameness is evoked, not only through the meeting with 'the others', but also through 'resonance' amongst people of the same kind. So in this era of commercialisation, the locality of players does not seem to be as important as their ability to live up to what is expected of them, because in the end it is victory that matters:

"Ideally I would like to have local players, but as long as they search the Merseyside for players, and it turns out that they are not good enough... then that's just the way it is," Brian says. For a successful club like Liverpool, only the best is good enough. "We want the best players in our team." Local roots matters in a way, but only to a certain extent:

The local players should get their chance, but at the end of the day we need to have the best players and then it doesn't matter where they come from. And I don't think there should be any change of rules, saying that you have to have so and so many local players in your team. The world has changed and it's all different nowadays.

Accordingly, the manager and the owners are expected to bring the best players in because it is vital for the Liverpool fans to remain the most successful football club in England. They did end second in the League in 2008/09, but the team has been struggling in the 2009/10-season. The chance of qualifying for next season's Champions League is slowly vanishing.

And with a debt exceeding well over £200m, the Merseyside club is in at the deep end. No 'big-name' players are likely to join the club in the near future.

Yet another scare was thrown at the fans early in 2010. In January, Rafael Benítez admitted he feared the club could be forced to sell star-player Fernando Torres – even captain Steven Gerrard – if the money was right. All in order to cover some of the club's debt:

Benítez is still confident of keeping Torres — and his captain, Steven Gerrard — even if Liverpool fail to finish in the top four, but when pressed on whether an extraordinary offer for one of them, such as a £100m bid for Torres, would be rejected automatically, he said: "We would have conversations if we had to decide about this." That contrasted with his answer to the same question in November, when he said: "It won't happen, I'd quit."⁵⁷

The Liverpool fans are facing an uncertain future.

⁵⁷ Northcroft, Jonathan. 2010. "Rafael Benítez fears club may sell Fernando Torres" in *the Times*: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/sport/football/premier_league/liverpool/article6982282.ece Downloaded 15.01.2010 15:35.

Epilogue

Liverpool ended up four points behind Manchester United in 2008/09. The fans celebrated the season. It has been years since Liverpool put in a serious challenge for the League title.⁵⁸ I am talking to a young Liverpool fan outside *the Olympia*.⁵⁹

“Away at Fulham, the clock had passed ninety minutes. It was still 0-0. The race for the League title would be over if we didn’t win. Everyone was feeling down. I think we had given up. Then suddenly Benayoun runs through and puts the ball in the net. The crowd goes completely mental. We stay behind after the match and sing our hearts out. For almost half an hour we sing: ‘WE’RE GONNA WIN THE LEAGUE! AND NOW YOU’RE GONNA BELIEVE US!!’ Benayoun’s goal won us the match. From being out of the race, we were suddenly top of the League. Nothing else in life will get you down and then up again in an instant. Nothing. Fulham away, Portsmouth away and Chelsea at home in the League. There have been so many moments like this, this season”

My friend is a little bit tired now. It is late in the night. Being a football supporter can be an exhausting existence emotionally, physically and mentally. Now two months of ‘football-free’ summer lies ahead. Maybe we need it. We say our goodbyes and head home to wait for tomorrow’s hangover.

It is evident that football permeates life for many in Britain. Their whole existence revolves around the fixture-list. Every weekend, and sometimes in the midweek, they are tied up doing the thing they cannot live without. So it comes as no surprise when the Liverpool fans react to the recent changes.

I started off this account by posing the question of how the local Liverpool supporters experience the commercialisation of English football. During the last twenty years or so, the face of English football *has* changed. Players from abroad have flooded the island, and foreign investors and businessmen have taken an interest in the game, in one way or the other. Whatever their motivation, it is nevertheless a fact that half the Premier League clubs are now owned by foreigners. It might be that the fans’ perception of reality differs from the one insisted on by the owners, but the fans’ views are nonetheless what they believe to be true

⁵⁸ Liverpool last won the League in 1990.

⁵⁹ A concert-hall in West-Derby, Liverpool.

regardless of what the owners might think. And if the fans believe that this is what it really *is like*, then it is also what the reality *is* for them. What follows below will examine how and why a phenomenological approach has been useful in understanding how the Liverpool supporters experience the recent developments in English football.

Robert Sokolowski, himself a phenomenologist, states that: “[o]ne of the great deficiencies of the phenomenological movement is its total lack of any political philosophy” (Sokolowski 2000: 226). Despite this, I still believe that it is possible to address political issues within the frame of phenomenology because it is through understanding *what reality is* for people that one can understand why certain things become political issues in some places, and not in others. A phenomenological approach can be part of a critique of the recent developments in English football because this approach emphasizes how people perceive the world. By focusing on their worldview one can get a grip on why conflicts arise, how they are played out and evolve because through an approach like this one can also understand the motivations and reasons behind different kinds of activities and actions. There is an underlying morale in the fans’ perception of reality which informs their lives and this morale gives them a clear understanding of how things are, how they should be, and how they are not supposed to be. So by looking into how people experience the world, and how things in the world present themselves to them in and through such experience, this approach *will* become political, given the political potentialities found in the subject matter.

During the fieldwork, a researcher unavoidably becomes part of the subject he is studying and this influences how he chooses to portray his findings. By learning to *think according to others*, a new world sometimes opens up and other ways of looking at the world appears. This is not to say that the researcher loses himself completely in ‘the others’, but his engagement in a particular society will sometimes, and in some ways, influence his understanding and thus influence his written account of what happened there and then.

This account has been recreated from my experience in the field and from my memories and field-notes. Obviously, these have had to be transformed from real life to a text fixed by writing which further means that the written account is not reality as such, but rather a portrayal of a perception of reality, understood in retrospect via the interplay between myself and the more or less random individuals I met during my time in Liverpool. So by trying at the same time to understand their perception of reality, as well as describing it, I have slowly gotten a grip on what matters for Liverpool supporters.

In this particular case, the Liverpool supporters are trying to get rid of the American owners because they do not view them as proper custodians of the club. This description has therefore unavoidably been influenced by these political issues. The ‘pressure’ from the outside which nowadays is felt as a ‘threat’, reinforces the fans’ sense of belonging and sameness. So not only rival clubs, but also the American owners, become ‘significant others’ against which the Liverpool fans understand themselves.

Narratives play a significant part in this process. In narratives, ‘scattered events’ are put into meaningful totalities which make people understand both who they are and the world around them. Through stories they communicate and convey their self-understanding and worldview. In other words, narratives help structure their lives. Their ‘being-in-the-world’ is shaped, maintained and changed through the interaction with others and different stories help them ‘here and now’ as they carry this knowledge with them as they go about living their lives. In this sense, narratives both structure their *present* and place them in *history*.

Through sharing stories, they are connected to the passage of time, but they are also *emplaced* because places evoke stories and memories. Places are full of content and “a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event” (Casey 1996: 27). In this sense, it might be more fitting to say that places *happen* when people interact because a place is inherently interwoven with the people who spend their time there. Local lives are locally lived in localities and people living in localities draw their knowledge from living there because “the very *cultivation* at stake in *culture* has to occur *somewhere*” (Casey 1996: 33). This *somewhere* is not coincidental to the *cultivation* that goes on there. What a place is depends on “the understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvement in the world” (Ingold 2000: 189) and people’s knowledge and experiences are therefore inextricably linked to their lived experience in a specific place.

So what is going on in Liverpool is specific to this place, even though similar things might be happening elsewhere. This means that a place comes with ways of doing things and ways of perceiving reality. And since people are inherently social, it follows that this ‘being-with-one-another’ and ‘doing-things-together’ forms and informs the people’s self-understanding and their sense of belonging to a community. In the context of football, the ‘cultivation’ or reenactment that occurs on match-day reinforces this sense of belonging. Depending on the situation, people ‘resonate’ with one another on different levels, be it over a

pint in the pub or the collective celebration of a cup-triumph. Several ‘taskscape’ are happening at the same time, in the same place. And as these ‘taskscape’ are enacted and reenacted, they come to have an impact on *what* a ‘landscape’ is and *how* it is perceived by those living there, because people play their part in how the physical world is formed and constituted.

‘Landscapes’ are sometimes changed by deliberate and conscious actions. Both the stadium and the Anfield-area have constantly changed to meet the needs and demands of various people and these changes have subsequently influenced their perception of the place. But what a place *is* means different things for different people. In certain contexts, they feel part of a larger collective. In others, they might focus on idiosyncratic understandings of what it means. So fans differ in what they do and how they play out their identity, depending on which ‘taskscape’ they involve themselves in. In many areas fans do disagree and they definitely speak with many voices when it comes to team selections, tactics, players bought and sold and so on. But when it comes to the ownership-situation and the proposed stadium-move they speak with one voice.

Those who gather in and around the stadium week after week come to feel a strong attachment to the stadium. It becomes part of who they are. Not surprisingly, no ‘Red’ would accept a move-in with the ‘Blue’ part of town. The logic of how British football fans feel connected to the stadium simply does not follow the logic of economics. The ‘sporting-place’ is an intrinsic part of football supporters’ identities and a move-in with their fiercest rival, the most ‘significant other’, would surely water down essential differences. Needless to say, crossing these symbolic boundaries is out of the question.

One would think that a move away from Anfield would arouse stronger feelings too. But, as it turns out, the fans seem to agree that a move is needed. It is rather a move away from *the area* of the club’s origins the fans oppose. Several English clubs have moved away from their original ground, but most of them have remained in their area of origin. The prospect of more money to buy better players in order to win matches and titles does not supersede the fans’ attachment to place. In order to explain what the fans feel about moving to Stanley Park, one would thus be inclined to claim that the area matters more than the actual stadium. The historic attachment to the area is obviously one of the main reasons for this. Another reason is that by staying, the fans can go on with their match-day rituals as they have

always done, because the fans' connection to this place is inextricably linked to how they perceive themselves and this further comes with certain ways of 'ways of doing things'.

This extends to the fans' expectations directed towards the players. Whether the team consists of local players or not, does not seem to matter as long as the team is winning. It is rather the territory of the crowd that matters. So by being the fans' and the club's representatives on the pitch, the players have to perform in line with what is expected of them. In other words, the players have to perform in accordance with a certain 'way of doing things'. The team is in focus and the individual player is nothing without the team. If a player shows that he is one of 'us', it does not matter where he is coming from. A player's loyalty, passion and will to sacrifice himself for the collective, is more important in achieving 'resonance' with the fans. But if the result is going against the team, a player's origin or nationality can become focus of attention if the fans do not believe he is performing to his ability. So the collective approach emphasized in the 'Liverpool Way' means that what matters is how the players show their commitment, loyalty and sense of belonging through giving everything for the team, and thus subsequently for the fans.

So through football people understand who they are on different levels. Its importance definitely stretches beyond the pitch. Since Bill Shankly took over as manager in the late 1950s, Liverpool FC went on to become the most successful club in England. The city went through hardships in other areas of life, but football gave the people something to be proud of. It gave them a feeling of superiority in a period when the Scousers were looked down upon from the outside. But today, the position as the most successful team in England is threatened. When Manchester United won the League title in 2008/09, they equalled Liverpool's record of eighteen Championships. Though the hardships have subsided, the pride that comes with football is still important: "It's all this bullshit about being the greatest football club in the world, but we know we are, they know we are, and they know that we know we are, and it really pisses them off," Brian tells me.

Yet, we have seen that there is a real fear that the 'glory days' may be over, and the fans know what happened to Leeds United. The Liverpool fans are worried about the future. While writing this, Liverpool's chances to qualify for next season's Champions League is only theoretical. Considering the club's current debt situation, the Liverpool fans face significant anxieties and the tainted promise of a glorious future have made them turn against

the American owners. Needless to say, the fans' dissatisfaction with them has intensified and demonstrations have become more frequent.

Even though one, as a researcher and football fan, sometimes becomes fully absorbed in the moment, in the anticipation, ecstasy or disappointment when watching a football match, it is important in more dispassionate moments to take a more critical view on what is going on in English football, because everything is not right. Many clubs have jumped on the money-train. Everyone fears being left behind at the station, standing there waiting anxiously for a sheik to jump off when the next train arrives. Big clubs like Manchester United and Liverpool have huge debts. Players might be sold and ticket-prices might go up in order to cover it.

When the Football League was started up in 1888, "the League [...] insisted that money be shared between its large and small clubs, a structure designed to keep all its member clubs reasonably strong, and maintain some rough equality on the field" (Conn 2004: 4). In 1992, the first division broke away from the rest of the Football League. The introduction of the Premier League and the deal with BSkyB and the BBC made "huge money [...] pour in – and the big clubs took it all. It took some years for most people, most fans, to realise what was happening; the new era was so refreshing after the caging, stigma and disasters of the eighties, that it seemed a new dawn" (Conn 2004: 5). Now it seems that the investors have come to take the money from the clubs.

Since the Premier League was introduced, only Blackburn, Manchester United, Arsenal and Chelsea have won it. Blackburn has fallen behind, and the 'big four' consisting of Manchester United, Chelsea, Arsenal and Liverpool, have dominated the domestic competitions for years. Only once in the last five years, when Everton ended in fourth in 2005, has a team other than the 'big four', managed to grab one of the lucrative qualifying-spots for the Champions League. One would be very hard pressed if one were to defend the idea that the Premier League was introduced to make it a more fair competition. It would be easier to argue that the introduction of the Premier League and the Champions League has deliberately displaced the balance in favour of the bigger clubs. But more importantly, these developments have attracted the interest from foreign investors. The fear of being left behind in the pursuit of money and glory, made Liverpool FC go down the same road. The Americans seduced the fans and the former owner into believing that they were all into respecting the tradition and the special character of the club. But time has told the fans that

David Moores might have acted with ‘his head up his arse’ when he sold the club. Harry does not give him a lot of credit:

David Moores is the idiot in the family. During his spell at the family business Littlewoods, he showed that he was completely incompetent, and had no idea about running a business. The rest of his family are Evertonians, so he simply got the shares in his hands, and he has run the club like an idiot. David Moores would tell you that he got a better offer from the Americans. But the fact is that he sold it to the Americans because he got a better deal for himself, and Rick Parry⁶⁰ got half a million in bonus for the job.

The fans *were* longing for success. Now they fear disaster. They have realised that the ship has started to take in water and they wait anxiously as the ship slowly sinks. But the fans do not just sit there watching. They are organising themselves. They are looking into the possibility of supporter ownership and while they are waiting for the Americans to realise they are not wanted, they are working towards a temporary solution where the fans can get a supporter-representative on the board. Only time can tell whether they will succeed or not. But one thing is certain: For however long the Americans stay put, they will never regain the support of the fans. For that they have done too much wrong.

If you think of it, it is quite absurd that two persons can control a football club and take all the decisions, when every week 45,000 people turn up to live out their passion. When the development of the British game is affecting football in such a way that it is a chance the club will have to sell their best players to avoid going into administration and get points deducted, it is hardly over the top to say that this is a political issue. The owners have the power to decide on whether to sell players or not, build a new stadium or not, raise ticket-prices and so on, even though in theory, anyone could have borrowed money from the bank, put the debt on the club, and then use the income from ticket-sales, player-sales, prize-money etc. to pay it off. When the assets have been sold, the club will still have a market-value because the fans are one of the most important contributors to the phenomenon. What would a goal from thirty yards be without fans cheering? What would a mistake by the referee be without thousands of fans screaming he got it wrong? And what would be the point of playing away from home when there is no one there to abuse you?

So in an imagined scenario, but not a totally unrealistic one, when the assets have been sold and the debt covered, the owners may abandon ship, pocket the money and leave club and fans muttering behind. Maybe it is time to let the fans have a say in this. Maybe it is

⁶⁰ Liverpool's Chief Executive, who later resigned from his position at the club, partly because of internal conflicts and partly because of the fans' dissatisfaction directed towards him.

better to spread the risk on thousands of fans than gambling on some foreign 'investor'. What would football be without fans anyway?

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